







THE
STEP - M O T H E R.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1848.

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THE STEP-MOTHER.



CHAPTER I.

THERE was a spot in Mallington Park where the ground, approaching the river at a point where the banks were low and the stream broad and shallow, was inundated during a great part of the spring and autumn. A number of stunted willows, growing out of long sedge and rushes, covered about four acres of land, diversified here and there by tall poplars, gathered into groups of five or six, planted close together. This watery piece of ground was a sort of preserve during the winter months for a great number of the duck tribe; the snipe, too, was always to be found there, and not unfrequently the bittern; for the part of the park where it was situated was one

little frequented, being beyond the spot where the road we have so often mentioned turned over the bridge. A sandy path, however, raised a little above the neighbouring ground, wound round the marsh, taking a thousand turns and bends among the trees ; and then passing through a thick copse, and over two small bridges and a ferny deer pasture, it joined the broad road that led direct from the house to the great gates.

On the evening after the accident which, with its consequences, has occupied so much of our attention, about half an hour before nightfall, the graceful figure of Lucy Edmonds was observed walking along the sandy path by the side of the swamp, which at that shady hour offered a dreary and melancholy scene enough. She had a basket on her arm, and her fair face was sad, with her eyes bent down upon the ground.

I have said that she was observed ; for there was one watching her ; and when she came into the part of the wood where the trees closed thickest, Jack Williams walked out from amongst the nearest group of poplars, and advanced to meet her. Lucy started ; but it was the suddenness of his appearance alone that surprised her, and her manner clearly showed that she had held communication of some kind with him before.

“Ah! Mr. Williams,” she said, “I did not expect to see you here.”

“No, Miss Lucy,” replied the man; “but I came to meet you, for I watched you out; and I thought you would like to hear the truth of how he is going on, poor fellow.”

Lucy turned towards him with a look of apprehension. “Going on!” she cried—“Poor fellow! What do you mean, Mr. Williams? Oh! tell me, what is the matter now?”

“What! have you not heard?” asked Williams; “why, he has met with a bad accident; but don’t frighten yourself—he is better and will do well—that is, if his spirits are kept up; but don’t frighten yourself; he will do very well, I tell you. But the matter is this, as I was saying—I wrote him a note, you know, telling him that your father wished you to marry young Garland; and off he set from London directly. Mr. Morton, a gentleman who has been staying down here—”

“Oh! I know him very well,” replied Lucy Edmonds; “he has been several times to see my father.”

“Well, he was in the chaise with Mr. Latimer,” continued Williams; “and they came on at a great rate till they reached Mallington Common, about eight o’clock last night. There the horses ran

away with them, and went over the bank into Mother Brown's Pit. Mr. Morton was very little hurt, but poor Alfred was taken out speechless."

The man paused, and Lucy wrung her hands in bitter grief. "But you say he is better?" she cried, after a moment's silence. "Oh! tell me true, Mr. Williams."

"Yes, he is better," answered her companion—"a good deal better; but I know what would make him quite well."

"And what is that?" demanded Lucy Edmonds.

"If you would come and see him, Miss Lucy," said Williams, "or promise to do so to-morrow; it would do him more good than all the stuff out of Dr. Nethersole's shop."

"That is impossible," answered Lucy Edmonds, firmly; "how could I go up to Mallington House?—and besides—"

"He is not at Mallington House," replied Williams, interrupting her; "he is at Mother Brown's cottage, on the common. You could come quite well, and nobody know anything of it."

"No," answered Lucy, "I promised my father that I would not see him, and I cannot."

"Then you are a very silly girl," answered

Williams sternly; "or else you are going to do what your father wishes, and marry young Garland. Ay, ay! Count upon a woman's love! It is no more to be leaned upon than one of those sedges. But I'll go away and tell him to break his heart for you no more; for that you have got a new lover, and care no more for him."

"Oh! do not, do not be so cruel," said Lucy, weeping bitterly; "you know that what you say is not true. Tell him, if you will, not to think of me any more; for my father says he will never let him have me. But do not tell him I have or can forget him, for that is false."

"Well, I will tell him," replied Williams; "but he won't easily believe you love him much, if you will not come to see him even when he is lying sick. He will think that you do not wish to know how he is."

"Oh! he knows better," replied Lucy; "he knows I would give anything in the world to hear every day how he is."

"Well, I can let you know that," said Williams. "If you can come out about this place of an evening—say at this time—I will be down and tell you how he is going on, for I am lodging at Widow Brown's, and I see him very often."

"Oh! do, do," cried Lucy, eagerly. "I will

come whenever I can ; but do not wait long for me ; for my father might send me somewhere else. But I will come whenever I can, indeed I will."

"Well, you are a good girl after all, and do love him, I believe," replied Williams.

"Oh, you know I do, too well!" answered Lucy Edmonds.

"Then you are very silly for not following your love," answered the man ; "fathers have always such crotchets ; and if a girl did not take her own way, no girl would ever marry the man she loves. If Mr. Latimer did not mean fair by you, it would be another thing ; but he has offered to marry you at once—ay, and he will marry you too, whatever your father may say, for love will have its way."

"But my promise, my promise," said Lucy, with a deep sigh.

"Nonsense about promises," answered Williams ; "they never hold good long against love, Lucy Edmonds. However, I will bring you word how Alfred is going on every evening about this time ; and you can come and hear it if you like ; so now good-night."

Lucy bade him adieu, and, wiping the traces of tears from her eyes, walked on towards her home. Williams remained gazing after her ; and his feelings were of so strange and mixed

a nature, that we may well pause to look into them more closely. He gazed after Lucy Edmonds, I have said, and certainly with some admiration of her beauty; but it was with no thought of robbing Alfred Latimer of the heart he had won, even if it had been possible; and the only observation he made to himself, was—"She's very pretty; it is a pity he should not have her." It was not that he was without those passions which might have led him to seek to possess the fair being he thus admired; or merely that he felt towards another in a distant land—though such was the case—that fierce eager love which often, in the most unprincipled, seems to absorb all those feelings that in less intense characters are roused by and divided amongst many; but every one has a peculiar morality of his own; and very often, where it is extended to the fewest possible points, it is the sternest and most inflexible upon them; and thus this man, who would not have hesitated one moment to rob another of his purse, or, in case of strife, to take the life of a fellow-creature like that of a dog, would have shrunk with a sense of shame from acts that thousands of well-dressed gentlemanly men look upon as the amusement of a morning. He would not have wronged one whom he regarded as a friend, nor have seduced his wife,

nor taken his mistress, nor traduced his character, or betrayed his confidence. These are gentlemanly crimes, which were quite out of his station, and out of his character. He had his own, indeed, black and terrible ; but these he was without.

After Lucy was gone, he sat down upon the stump of a willow, and began to ponder on the future and the present. "She will make him a sweet wife," he thought; "and, though she's very different from Margeritta, yet she will suit him. If we can get together money enough to buy a schooner out there, and set ourselves up in one of those beautiful little islands, we may carry on gloriously. I can sail the ship, and he can do many things that I can't. It's just the life to suit him. I wonder if he'll consent. If we carry off pretty Lucy by force he'll be obliged ; for he must be off as fast as possible. I have him there ; and then it will be the best thing he can do. I long to see Black Jack flying over us ; but I must not let him squander away his money with Bill Maltby and such fellows. We'll have no Bill Maltby amongst us either. He's a pitiful knave—cheats at cards and dice. We'll have bold fellows, that can fight only ; and then we'll make fine work with the turbans. But he has no notion of my plan yet ; and I had better sound him. I'll tell him some stories of what

happened last year at Zante, and see how he likes it. But once we've carried her off, he must go; and then what better could he do?"

Such were some of the thoughts of him who deserved the name of ruffian more than villain; but there were many other ideas crossed his mind, fleeting, transitory, and strange—sensations rather than thoughts, making a strange mixed mass of good and of evil, of coarse fierceness, and many softer emotions. When he returned to the common, a carriage was standing at the nearest point of the road to the cottage of Widow Brown, and Williams at once recognised the liveries of Mrs. Charlton. He saw, likewise, the horse of Mr. Nethersole; and he walked on with a leisurely sauntering pace, still keeping within sight, but affecting to amuse himself with looking at the shrubs and bushes. He then descended into the pit, in which he saw some people gathered about the spot where the chaise had fallen; and he found that the little crowd was occupied with the removal of the two dead horses in a cart for Mr. Markham's kennel. In one of the persons there assembled, however, he instantly recognised a gentleman whom he had no great inclination to meet, namely, Mr. Gibbs, the traveller, with whom he had made a somewhat unpleasant acquaintance in Wenlock Wood. But Williams was not one to suffer even

conscience to cow him; and he gazed upon the other's face, with a stern and stedfast look, more like that of an injured person than of one who had committed an injury. He was very much surprised, however, when Gibbs advanced to meet him with a pleasant smirk upon his face, saying, "Ah, Mr. Williams! I am very glad to see you."

"Indeed!" said Williams, without relaxing a feature of his face; "that is more than I can say to you.—What makes you glad to see me, pray?"

"Because, Mr. Williams," replied the traveller, "I always like to do justice; and though, when I last beheld you, I thought you very like the man who knocked me down and robbed me on the other side of the water, I am now convinced that I was quite mistaken."

Williams replied, drily, "Oh! you are, are you? Well, better late than never. But let it teach you not to suspect innocent people again. I should like to hear, however, what it is has convinced you at last."

"I will tell you in a moment," said Mr. Gibbs. "In the first place, the man must have been taller than you; in the next place, he wore different shoes; and, in the third place, I find you changed a five pound note that very day at the inn, and

another yesterday at the linendraper's. Now, no notes were taken from me ; and a man is not likely to take another man's money when his own pockets are full."

"He may want to fill them fuller," answered Williams, "so that's no reason, Mr. What's-your-name ; but as for me, I got my pay and prize-money when my ship was paid off ; so I had enough of my own for the time being ; but when it is all spent, if you will tell me which way you are going with a good lot of gold about you, I'll see what I can do with yours."

He spoke laughing, and Mr. Gibbs laughed, too—quite heartily. Nay, he even added, "Well, I did you injustice, Mr. Williams ; I beg your pardon for it frankly, and as it's growing dark, if you will come down to the Bagpipes we will have a bowl of punch together, and forget all grievances."

"I can't just now," answered Williams ; "but I will to-morrow night if you like."

Mr. Gibbs agreed to this change of his proposed plan, and Williams, seeing the top of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, the sight of which he just caught over the bank, moving rapidly away, turned upon his heel and entered the cottage.

Several of the persons who had overheard this conversation stared at Mr. Gibbs ; and one of

them, a surly carter, who knew Jack Williams well, uttered in a murmur between his teeth—what was probably the internal opinion of all—“Well, you ’re a fool, if ever there was one.” But in this instance, at least, Mr. Gibbs was not such a fool as people thought. The cart moved off with the two dead horses; and the people, who had been gathered round, followed it. Mr. Gibbs remained for a moment or two behind, then stooping down, as if to tie his shoe, he pulled something out from beneath a bramble bush, scratching himself a good deal as he did so; and then climbing the bank, he paused as soon as he got into the clearer light which the higher ground afforded, examined something which he held in his hand attentively, and walked straight away to Mallington House.

CHAPTER II.

MR. MORTON was dressing for dinner, when a servant entered his room, saying, "There is a person below, sir, who wishes to speak with you directly upon business of importance."

"Indeed!" said Morton calmly, "did he give his name?"

"He said his name is Gibbs, sir," answered the footman, "and that he would not detain you a minute."

"I know no such person," replied the young gentleman, looking at his watch; "however, as there is time, tell him that I am dressing; but if his business be of real importance, he can see me here. If not, let him call to-morrow."

The man retired, and in two or three minutes returned, ushering in Mr. Gibbs.

Mr. Gibbs bowed low, very low indeed; and then hemmed and bowed again, while the servant shut the door and retired.

"Well, sir," said Morton, waxing somewhat impatient. "What may be your business?"

"My name is Gibbs, sir," rejoined the other, with a most agreeable smile, "and yours is Morton."

The young gentleman bowed his head.

"This pocket-book, then, I suppose belongs to you," said Mr. Gibbs, in reply to this mute assent.

Morton started and turned round, "Yes, sir, it does," he said, "I must have dropped it in getting out of the chaise last night—it is very strange I did not miss it."

It would, indeed, have been strange, if he had not been so near Louisa Charlton; but that altered the case. Mr. Gibbs placed the wetted and soiled book in its owner's hands, with another low bow, adding, in a marked and peculiar tone, "I was obliged, sir, to open it and examine the contents, to ascertain to whom it belonged."

This intimation, from some cause or other, seemed to give Morton cause for thought, but at length with a light and half laughing look, he replied, "I understand what you mean, Mr. Gibbs; and all I can say is, that I must trust to your discretion, which, if it prove stable, shall not go unrewarded."

"Pray, do not mention such a thing, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs, "my discretion you may fully

trust to without any reward ; and, indeed, there is a subject on which I have wished to speak to you for two or three days, which will show you how discreet I can be."

"I think I must ask you to choose another time, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, looking again at his watch. "I must go down as soon as I am dressed."

"When you please, sir," answered the traveller, "but, before you are dressed I can give you an inkling of the matter. I think you take a good deal of interest in the family of a park-keeper over the river, named Edmonds."

"I do certainly," said Morton, "he is a very good, respectable man."

"And in his daughter, I believe, sir," rejoined Mr. Gibbs.

Morton drew up his head, and looked at his companion in some surprise. "I do not understand your meaning, sir," he answered. "I have once, or perhaps twice, seen his daughter, but I take no other interest in her than in the rest of his family. Pray explain yourself."

"Why, I thought, sir—I thought," replied Mr. Gibbs, hesitating ; "I thought I saw you—I am sure it was a gentleman—speaking with her, for nearly an hour, about a fortnight ago in the park ; and he came from this house, and went back to

this house. And now I thought—that is to say, I suspected—I mean, I imagined it might be interesting to him to know, that she is in the custom of meeting—that is to say, I am sure she has met four days ago, and to-night, too—a man, named Williams, who was supposed—that is to say, accused of knocking me down and robbing me in Wenlock Wood, when I was here last.”

Now all this information was interesting to Mr. Morton; for it gave him a clue to part of Alfred Latimer’s conduct, at least he thought so. The facts of his having seen Williams (whose name had been mentioned in his hearing) at the cottage of Widow Brown, of the man’s meeting that night with Lucy, and of their preceding interview four days before, connected themselves with the letter Alfred Latimer had received, and with his eagerness to return to Mallington immediately after having read it. With Morton all was at present fancy; it was a conjectural collocation of circumstances, and the proof was yet to be obtained. But how? was the difficult question. To act as a spy, or to employ a spy upon any other man’s actions, was not to be thought of; and he resolved to let matters take their course, evolve themselves as they would, and at the same time to employ the information he had received as occasion might require.

“In the first place, Mr. Gibbs,” he replied, when his cogitations came to an end, “let me inform you that you are mistaken in supposing that I am the person whom you saw talking with Lucy Edmonds. I never spoke to her out of her father’s house in my life, and at the time you mention was not a visitor here. May I ask how near you were to the person you supposed to be me?”

“Oh, dear sir, I was a long way off,” replied Mr. Gibbs. “I was at the top of the house amusing myself, as I usually do, with this little instrument,” and he pulled out a small telescope from his pocket. “From the window of my room,” he continued, “I command the park on one side, and the hill up to the common on the other, and I see all that goes on in the place.”

“I should not think it a very profitable or very worthy inquiry, sir,” replied Morton, “but every man has his tastes; and, as meddling with other people’s business is not one of mine, I can have nothing further to do with the matter you have mentioned, except, indeed, to say it would be, I think, but an act of Christian charity to warn poor Edmonds, that his daughter is placing herself in dangerous circumstances. That would be drawing some good from perquisitions which I cannot advise you to pursue further.”

“You mistake, sir, you mistake; allow me very

respectfully to say, you mistake," said Mr. Gibbs, with some warmth. "You must allow me, sir, to clear myself. I do not use my telescope for the purpose of prying into other people's affairs, though I can't help seeing them if they come in my way. Sir, the truth is this: I have been knocked down and robbed near here. We could not identify the man; but I am quite sure of who he is, and I am resolved to bring him to justice. I have fixed my eye upon a particular man, sir, and he shall find that he can't escape that eye. I watch him and his doings every moment I have to spare, and ere long I shall get hold of the end of the clue."

"That alters the case very materially, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, "and I trust that you will succeed; but, in regard to this poor girl, it would, I think, be but right to speak with her father upon the subject, and leave it to him to take such steps as he may think fit."

"May I ask, sir," said Mr. Gibbs, in a low tone, "whether he is acquainted or not with certain circumstances. I wish to act discreetly, sir; and would not, for the world, betray a secret which had accidentally fallen into my possession."

"You are quite right, Mr. Gibbs," said Morton. "But, to answer your question, he is not aware of anything; no one, indeed, is. The matter is of

no great consequence, indeed ; but every man has his whim."

" Oh! certainly, sir, certainly," said Mr. Gibbs. " But I won't detain you longer, sir ; and if you have any further commands for me you will find me at the inn, sir ; for I have determined not to quit this place till I have got the right sow by the ear.—But you cannot think, sir, what an advantage it would be to your hair if you would use Grimsditch's incomparable Balm of Trinidad. It preserves and increases the natural curl ; prevents it from falling off or turning grey ; communicates to it an admirable gloss ; keeps it always, whether in rain or heat, in perfect order ; and, whether applied to the clustering ringlets of female loveliness, or to the bolder waves that float round the forehead of masculine beauty, it is admitted on all hands to be the only thing yet discovered which can be said to gild refined gold, and render perfection still more perfect."

" Well, send me some, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, smiling ; " and now, indeed, I must go." Morton then hastened down to the drawing-room, but was disappointed in his hope of finding Louisa alone. Mrs. Charlton was, indeed, not yet down ; but Dr. Western was seated on the sofa by the side of his fair ward.

" Ay, my young friend," said the clergyman,

with a laughing look towards Louisa: "I am very much in the way here, but I wanted to speak to you, so I came early, even at the risk of being the unfortunate third.—Nay, Louisa," he continued, seeing her rising as if she received what he said as a hint to leave them, "you know I am the friend of both, and give my hearty consent—so if you run away I shall think that you wish to hide your arrangements from me. I have nothing to say to him that you may not hear, though, perhaps, the confidence is not quite reciprocal. Morton, have you done what you said you would?"

"No, my dear sir," replied Morton, "I have had no time." All to-day we have been in the strait-waistcoat of society, and yesterday, while we were five minutes alone together, we somehow talked of other things."

"Oh! I know how quite well," answered Dr. Western; "but what need of time?—one minute will do it. My dear Louisa, let me introduce a friend of mine to you;" and leading Morton up to her, with a gay look, he whispered a word in her ear.

Louisa Charlton gazed in Morton's face with an expression of surprise almost amounting to alarm. But Morton, notwithstanding the good doctor's presence, threw his arms round her,

saying,—“ What, my beloved ! can a name make any difference to you ? ”

“ No,” murmured Louisa—“ oh ! no ; but this takes me very much by surprise.”

“ Our good friend here is wrong,” said Morton, “ in telling you thus, dear Louisa. Nay, he is wrong in telling you at all as yet ; for all is not settled, and I wished it to be so fully before I spoke.”

“ It is you who are wrong, Morton,” replied Dr. Western, “ the parson of the parish is always right. There should be no secrets between two people circumstanced as you are. Nay, more, I have to tell you, sir, that all is settled, as I will prove to you, if you will come and partake of a plain dinner with me to-morrow, at five, and then take a long walk. Louisa shall share the dinner if she will, but not the ramble ; and in the mean time, ma’am, remember that though I have taken the liberty of telling you other people’s secrets, you are not to follow my bad example.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Charlton entered the room, and found Morton, Louisa, and Dr. Western standing close together, with somewhat too evident symptoms of having been engaged in secret conclave. She made no observation, indeed ; but a slight smile, somewhat sarcastic and triumphant, crossed her lip, as if she would have said, had she

thought fit to speak what was passing within, "Ah! you think that I am blind; but you are playing my game while you imagine you are playing your own."

Dr. Western at once entered into conversation with the lady, telling her that "he had asked Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton to dine with him on the following day, and trusted she would be of the party."

"I suppose, in propriety, I ought to be," replied Mrs. Charlton; "but really, my dear sir, I have so many different things to do, that Louisa must go without a chaperon for once, especially when she is going to her guardian's house. Alfred tells me that you have been to see him, doctor, for which I am very much obliged."

"I thought it a duty, my dear lady," replied Dr. Western; "the accounts that reached me were so alarming that I feared I should find him very ill. There seems little the matter, however, but a few bruises; and I should think you could bring him home quite safely to-morrow."

Before Mrs. Charlton could reply, the door was thrown open to announce dinner, and the rector, advancing, gave her his arm, while Morton followed with Louisa.

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER BROWN's cottage was certainly by no means a pleasant place, and yet thither must I once more lead the gentle reader.

In the outer chamber of the cottage, which was divided into four rooms, two above and two below, and by the side of the large ill-constructed chimney sat Tom Brown, the widow's son, with an old yellow greasy tobacco-pipe in his mouth, puffing away clouds of no very fragrant smoke. There was something dull and yet fierce in the man's look; a dogged sullen brutality, more revolting to look upon than even the expression of more dangerous qualities, when lighted up by the beams of intellect and the fire of passion. He was a powerful fellow, as I have before described him; with a head immensely capacious and round behind; but so low and narrow in the forehead that his bristly hair reached within a finger's length of his eye-brows; and as he sa

there, though sometimes a momentary smile would change the expression of his dull face, yet in general a heavy frown still further contracted that meaningless and animal forehead. It is not necessary to inquire what emotions produced either the frown or the smile; but their course was soon after interrupted by the entrance of Williams, who spoke with him for a moment or two by the fire, and then turned towards the door which led into the inner chamber.

“Ah!” said Tom Brown, “there he lies on his back, like a dead crow, when he’s just as well as you or I, Jack. Well, I shall go and take a walk—I wonder what the devil he keeps lying there for?”

“He knows what he’s about,” answered Williams; “but don’t you go far, Tom, for we may want you. Where’s your mother?”

“Oh! she’s gone down to Mallington to buy some pork,” replied her son; and thus saying he walked out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Jack Williams in the mean time entered the room where Alfred Latimer lay; and the moment that he appeared the young gentleman started up in his bed, without any sign of pain or sickness, exclaiming, “Well, I’m devilish glad you’ve come at last; I thought you’d never be here.”

"Why, I had a good deal to do," said Williams, "and one can't manage obstinate people in a minute, Mr. Latimer."

"Ay, that's what my mother said of me this morning," rejoined the young gentleman. "She was over here, and wanted me to go back to the house; for she and that old fool Western have been laying their heads together, and settling that this was a very bad place for me to stay in, so that, fever or no fever, I ought to be brought over to Mallington. I wouldn't go, however, and then, just to drive me, she said she couldn't spare Wilkinson any longer."

"What did you say to that?" demanded Jack Williams.

"Why, I said I could spare him very well," answered Alfred Latimer, "and so sent him about his business, glad enough to get rid of him. I promised to come over to-morrow, however; so whatever is to be done must be done to-night."

"Oh! I've got all ready," replied Jack Williams, "if you are strong enough."

"I'm quite well," replied Alfred Latimer. "There's nothing the matter with me; but I've been thinking, Jack, how the deuce we shall get her across the water and through the village without people seeing. She will never be able to walk to the other bridge."

"To be sure not," answered Williams; "that's what has kept me such a time, for I couldn't hire a punt, all I could do. One fellow said he was sure I was going to poach the river, and he might have his boat seized. However, at last I got hold of young Blackmore, who promised to draw his father's punt up and amongst the reeds there; then we can get across in the dusk, without being seen, and have her up to the cottage at Illington in no time. But mind, Mr. Latimer, you're to marry her, you know."

"Oh—ah! I'll marry her," replied Alfred Latimer; "I'll marry her—don't you be afraid."

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Williams; "for I wouldn't help you if I thought you'd cheat her; and having given me your promise, I look to you to keep it. So, as that's settled, I've got a pack of things for you here in the bundle that will make you look as much like a gamekeeper as possible, leather leggings and all; and if you start over the back way just before dusk you'll find me down by the water. We must get Tom Brown, however, to stay in the boat while we are in the park. It will be awkward, however, if she doesn't come, since you have promised to go home to-morrow."

"If she doesn't I won't go," replied Alfred Latimer. "It will do well enough, and nobody

suspect anything, while I am lying here and supposed to be ill; but if I were up at Malington House, and going about, they'd say directly I had taken her—but she'll come, I think."

In about ten minutes, the step of Tom Brown was heard crossing the floor of the next room in haste, and the moment after he opened the door and put his head in, saying, "I say, Mr. Williams, have you been talking loud with that window open, for there's been a d——d fellow hanging about on the outside listening, or I am mistaken."

Williams started up with a heavy brow, without any reply, and, running to the window, looked forth.

"He's gone, he's gone," said Tom Brown; "as soon as he saw me come down the hill he was off like a shot."

"Do you know him?" asked Williams.

"I'm not quite sure," answered Brown, "but I think, by the look of him, that it was that dancing-master looking cove who got his head broke and lost his money one day."

"He may get his head broken to better purpose if he comes listening here," said Williams, and then fell into a train of thought, from which he was roused after a moment or two by Alfred

Latimer exclaiming—"Why, if he has heard all, our scheme will be blown over the whole place."

"No, no," answered his companion, "he did not hear enough for that. No names were mentioned, you know; and he couldn't make out much of it. However, Tom, you run down to the bridge, and see whether he crosses or not. If we can make sure of him till five o'clock I'll take care of him after that. He shan't blab till the thing is done, at all events."

"You stay there till Williams comes down to you," said Alfred Latimer, "and I'll give you five shillings for your pains, Brown."

Now, people's estimation of their conscience is very different in different individuals; but, unlike the appreciation of any other thing, the less a man has of it the less value does he place upon it. What is there on earth that Tom Brown would not have done for five shillings? As to selling his soul, that was no great matter; for, notwithstanding all that Dr. Western could do, he was not quite sure whether he possessed a soul or not; and if he had, the property undoubtedly was deeply mortgaged. But he would have taken the life of another and put his own neck in jeopardy at any time for a pound, and would have risked Botany Bay, the hulks, or

the pillory for any of the aliquot parts of the same sum. On his present errand, he set off at once with so rapid a step that he overtook Mr. Gibbs half way down the hill, and saw him enter the inn before he took his station on the bridge. The guard he kept was uninterrupted; for whether it was that the worthy traveller was conscious of being watched, or whether some other occupation kept him within, he did not issue forth again till the figure of Jack Williams was seen walking with a slow pace, and the usual swinging gait of a sailor, down towards the side of the river. No verbal communication took place between the two confederates, but the thumb pointed back over the right shoulder indicated to Tom Brown that he was to go back to the cottage, and Williams, walking into the inn, asked if Mr. Gibbs was at home. The landlady, the ostler, and the barmaid all looked at Jack Williams with a sort of shy and unpleasant aspect, which certainly was not very encouraging; but Mrs. Pluckrose replied civilly that she believed the gentleman was in, and sent to see; while Williams turned his back to the bar, looked out at the door, and twisted a cane switch which he held in his hand into a variety of curious forms.

While pausing there, he saw the carriage of

Mrs. Charlton going down the hill towards the rectory, with the sweet countenance of Louisa sitting calmly beside Mr. Morton, very apparent through the windows. There might be a slight glow upon her cheek ; but she did not seem at all anxious to avoid being seen thus publicly with her lover ; and Williams himself, as well as the two Misses Martin, and Messrs. Crump and Dixon, looked upon the approaching wedding as a settled thing.

“ Well, I declare ! ” cried Miss Mathilda Martin.

“ Bold enough, truly,” said Miss Martin ; “ but what could be expected with such a step-mother ? ”

“ I think his impudence is worse than hers,” rejoined Mathilda. “ I declare I’ve a great mind to write and tell the other guardian, in an anonymous kind of way, what Mrs. Charlton is encouraging and Dr. Western suffering.”

“ Wait a little, Matty,” said her sister ; “ the good lady is a deep one, and we have not seen the end of it yet.”

Before this interesting conversation had come to its conclusion, Mr. Williams had been introduced into the chamber of Mr. Gibbs, and a bowl of punch had been ordered, which speedily appeared. Mr. Gibbs, who paid with a degree of regularity for everything he bought, which he

often wished that others would imitate, drew forth a ten-pound note, and asked the maid who brought the punch to change it; and on her returning with the note unchanged, he applied to his new companion, but without success. Williams, for some reason, declared that he had no change, though his pocket was very heavy, and the girl civilly insisting that there was no hurry, Mr. Gibbs was obliged to desist. He was courtesy itself to his guest—he plied him with punch, he talked to him incessantly, he mingled soft allusions to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad with expressions of regret at having ever been betrayed into the folly of thinking that a seafaring gentleman like Mr. John Williams could have committed a highway robbery.

Williams listened to him with grim gravity; nothing that Mr. Gibbs could say could move him to more than a sardonic smile. In short, Jack Williams was an old bird, and was not to be caught with chaff such as Mr. Gibbs threw down before him. On the Balm of Trinidad, however, he was somewhat more discursive; and when they had well nigh got to the bottom of the bowl of punch, he began to twist upon his finger the long ringlets that hung over his whiskers, and inquired particularly into the merits of that fragrant essence. It was

a subject upon which Mr. Gibbs was eloquent, and he enumerated some nineteen or twenty of its admirable qualities, till at length Mr. Williams felt in his pocket and asked the price, producing at the same time a crown piece. The ruling passion strong in death showed Mr. Gibbs the opportunity of doing a little business, and unable to resist, he said, "The retail price was in truth seven-and-six-pence, but he would pass it to his friend Mr. Williams at the wholesale rate of five shillings."

"Well, then, let us have a bottle!" exclaimed Jack Williams, giving another coxcomb twist to the corkscrew curl.

Immediately Mr. Gibbs started up from the table; and approaching a large leather-covered case, which stood in the window, he dived into the interior thereof to bring up a bottle of the Balm of Trinidad. As he was doing so he heard the ladle rattle in the bowl, and turned his head round, when he saw Mr. Williams helping himself to some more punch.

"I've taken the liberty, Mr. Gibbs," said Jack Williams, in a slow tone, "to drink your health during your absence. Shall I fill your glass to return thanks?"

"Thank you, I'm coming back directly," said Mr. Gibbs; and, returning to the table, he pre-

sented his companion with a bottle of the fragrant balm, received his crown piece, and, filling himself a glass of punch—it was well nigh the last that the bowl contained—he drank it off.

Jack Williams in the mean while went on sipping his own, opening the bottle of fragrant balm, pulling out the cork, and smelling the odour with the air of a connoisseur. Mr. Gibbs then proposed another bowl, and Mr. Williams readily consented. The maid was summoned, the empty vessel carried away, and another replete with fragrant liquor speedily placed upon the table. By this time, however, the eyes of Mr. Gibbs had acquired a somewhat glassy and lackadaisical expression, and in a few minutes he began to nod; upon which Jack Williams gave him a meaning smile, and taking up the bowl, half emptied it at a draught. He then sat for about half an hour longer to watch the progress of his entertainer's sleep.

The Caliph Haroun Alraschid had a certain powder—we are informed by one of the most veracious of all possible histories—of which, when he wished to send any of his friends to sleep, he used to take a pinch and drop it into their wine or sherbet. Now, whether Jack Williams, in his travels in the East, had possessed himself or not of the Caliph's secret, certain it is that he in-

tended Mr. Gibbs to go to sleep, and that Mr. Gibbs dutifully complied with his desire. At length, as the sky was beginning to get a little grey, Williams rose, and taking up the worthy traveller in his arms, laid him quietly on his bed ; then descending the stairs he stopped a minute at the bar, saying to Mrs. Pluckrose, " You've made that punch devilish strong, marm, and Gibbs has got as drunk as an owl."

" Good gracious me !" cried the worthy landlady, " I hope he's not noisy."

" Oh, no," answered Williams ; " he's fallen sound asleep, and left me to drink out the bowl ; but I find my head queerish too, and so I'll have no more of it. Good-night, marm," and away he went.

Mrs. Pluckrose and the maid immediately proceeded to ascertain the facts of the case ; and finding the worthy traveller stretched upon his bed, apparently in a state of drunken sleep, they left him there, only taking the precaution of putting some towels under his boots that they might not dirt the counterpane.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a very pleasant little drive from Mallington House to the rectory, both for Edmond Morton and Louisa Charlton, and yet it would be very difficult to say in what its pleasantness consisted. They spoke very little, so that it could not be in conversation. They were aware that the eyes of the villagers were upon them, and therefore it was not in what is commonly called making love. Louisa felt a little awkwardness in thus first appearing with her lover alone, and therefore it was not in that ease and freedom from restraint which in itself is an enjoyment. It could only be, then, in being together, but that was something, and something very pleasant too. It connected itself by the fine links of thought with a future, when they should be always together—when, heart and hand united, and yet separate, they should go along the varied paths of life, mutually

enjoying the sunshine, and cheering each other in the shade.

As the picture rose up to the eye of hope, and fancy watered the flowers of the future, Louisa once or twice raised her beautiful confiding eyes to her lover's face, and read in it a promise of happiness that she felt sure would never be belied ; and Morton, as if he read every thought that was passing within, and sought to confirm the happy confident dream of fancy, laid his hand gently upon hers without uttering a word, but with the silent voice of the eyes, more convincing than oaths or protestations.

When they reached the rectory, strange to say, both were more at ease in their demeanour to each other than they had been when alone ; and the quiet simple dinner at the rectory passed over in calm and pleasant conversation, natural, straight-forward, true.

As soon as dinner was done, Dr. Western proposed to his young friend that they should set out upon their walk ; and having taken their hats and sticks, they issued forth from the rectory, and bent their steps towards the bridge. It was a calm and placid evening, with the sun already low behind the trees, though where the woody screen fell away in parts, the glowing sky beyond showed that the orb of day was still above the

horizon. The river lay, flooded with light, beneath them, as they passed over towards the gates of the park, and as they paused for a moment to gaze down upon the reflection of the banks in the water, they saw a boat pushed across from one side of the stream to the other, above half a mile lower down. Their conversation as they went on seemed grave and earnest; more than once the clergyman and his companion stopped; and the outstretched finger and eager look showed that the subject discussed was one of interest to both. At length, when within about five hundred yards of the house, they turned from their course, and bent their steps towards the park-keeper's cottage. Opening the door without ceremony, Dr. Western led the way in, and looked around; but the only person the little room contained was Mrs. Edmonds. She smiled and courtesied on seeing the rector; and, in reply to his question, said that Edmonds was up at the hall, having gone to speak with Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, in regard to some men who had been seen prowling about. Dr. Western sat down for a minute or two, and inquired in a careless tone for his young friends, Lucy and John.

“Oh! John is tending the fowls,” replied the mother; “and Lucy has gone down with a few

eggs to poor Janet Hazlewood : she is late this evening. I wish she would come back."

"She should be in before dark, Mrs. Edmonds," said Dr. Western, in a grave tone ; "and as you say there are strange men about the place, if you would take my advice, you would send her brother with her for a day or two, whenever she goes out."

"I will, sir," replied the park-keeper's wife.

She looked earnestly in the rector's face, as if there were questions she would fain have asked ; but either from timidity, or some vague apprehension, she did not put them ; and soon after Dr. Western and his young companion bade her good evening, and walked towards the hall. It was now nearly dark, and a twinkling star was here and there appearing in the sky, when suddenly Morton stopped, and said, "I thought I heard a scream."

"I heard a jay in the wood," replied Dr. Western ; but nevertheless they waited and listened. No other sound, however, broke the silence of the air ; and, after pausing for a few moments, they followed the path to the house. The great door of the hall was opened for them by Edmonds himself ; but, although they had been down to his house to seek him, neither of the two gentlemen seemed to have any particular

matter to communicate, for they merely told him to bring them a light into the library, and turned their steps thither themselves.

“I will see him to-morrow,” said Dr. Western, “and tell him privately, when I can admonish him a little; for though an excellent man, there is a certain degree of sternness about him which might drive the poor child to further imprudence, if not to evil.”

A minute after Edmonds entered with a light, and merely saying to Morton, in a respectful tone, that he would wait till that gentleman was at leisure, for he wished to speak with him for a moment, the park-keeper retired and shut the door. The dim light of the tallow-candle penetrated with difficulty the obscurity of the large old-fashioned room; but Dr. Western walked direct to one corner of the library, and took down a thick quarto, on which was inscribed the words, “History of ——shire.”

“Oh! I have seen that, my dear sir,” said Morton, with a smile. “I looked all through it before I left London, but it throws no light upon that part of the subject.”

“What an impatient thing is youth!” replied the worthy clergyman; and, laying down the book upon the long table, he opened it and turned over several pages. Besides the printed matter which

it contained, there was now displayed upon the broad margin numerous annotations, written in a small clear hand, and each signed by a single name. Between the leaves, too, were several scraps of written paper, some of which Morton barely looked at and passed over; but at one he paused, and read the whole contents with great attention; and then, turning to Dr. Western, he shook him by the hand, saying, "This is all that could be desired, indeed! How, in the name of good fortune, did you discover it, my dear sir?"

"By a very simple process," replied Dr. Western. "My predecessor at Mallington was a great antiquarian and genealogist. At his death I bought his books; and, amongst the rest, there fell into my hands a manuscript account of this part of the country. On looking in that, to see if I could find a clue to what you wanted, I met with numerous references to this book, and especially to the notes and memoranda of Lord Mallington, after this fashion:—'In History of ——shire, Mallington Park Library—the Earl's MS. illustrations.' I came up yesterday morning, and very soon satisfied myself that here was the information required."

"I must have a copy of this!" said Morton. "I suppose that it would be hardly justifiable to take the original."

"I do not see why," replied Dr. Western; "but, as a copy will do as well, you had better keep on the right side. We will get a pen and ink, and then half an hour will suffice to transcribe it."

Dr. Western moved towards the door as he spoke; but ere he reached it, Edmonds, the park-keeper, entered with a face a little pale, and an expression of intense anxiety in his eyes. "I am afraid, sir, I must go away," he said, addressing Morton; "for my boy has just come up to tell me that Lucy is not yet at home. I don't understand it, sir; I must go and see."

He evidently strove to speak calmly, but the father's apprehensions would have way, and his voice trembled, and his lip quivered. Dr. Western and Morton looked at each other with a grave and meaning glance; and Morton, closing the book before them, said in a low tone of voice to the rector, "We can do this to-morrow; let us go with him. He may need support and assistance."

Dr. Western nodded his head, and said in as easy a tone as he could assume, "We will go with you, Edmonds. But don't make yourself uneasy, my good man. Your wife told us that Lucy had gone down to poor old Janet Hazle-

wood's. Something may have occurred to detain her."

The man looked earnestly in Dr. Western's face, but he made no reply; for there was suspicion in his heart which he did not dare utter to any one else till it grew into certainty. The good old housekeeper, who had followed him into the hall, took the candle and closed the door after they had gone out; and directing their course across the park towards a spot where the trees came nearly down to the river's side, about two hundred yards' distance from the gates, they turned towards the marshy piece of ground where Williams and Lucy Edmonds had met the day before.

"Is there no other path she could have taken in coming home?" asked Morton, speaking to Edmonds, who, with his eyes bent forward to see if he could catch a glimpse of her coming form through the darkness of the night, had gone on in silence a few steps before the two gentlemen.

"She might take the gravel-walk, there, that runs through the trees above," said Edmonds; "but I don't think it likely, sir."

"Then I will go that way," said Morton.—
"Where does it join the other path?"

"Close by the osiers, sir," answered the park-keeper; and Morton, turning away, hurried on to the spot where the gravel-walk, which Edmonds

had mentioned, entered the thicker wood, and then pursued it, as fast as he could go, till it came to the side of the swamp. During the last thirty or forty yards, he could hear the voices of Dr. Western and the park-keeper speaking earnestly together, but they ceased as soon as he joined them; and, examining the ground to the right and the left as they proceeded, the whole party walked on till they came to the park wall. There was no gate nor door at that spot; but a little flight of wooden steps, up one side of the wall and down the other, soon brought them to the sandy lane, beyond which two or three cottages were seen by the side of the road; and, advancing to a door that stood exactly opposite, Edmonds opened it and went in, followed close by Dr. Western and Mr. Morton. The park-keeper cast a quick and eager glance around into every corner of the room. There was an old and sickly woman sitting in a large wicker-chair by the side of the little fire-place, and another woman of the same class, about forty years of age, busily making her some tea; but the form he looked for did not meet the poor man's eye, and his heart sunk.

"So Lucy is not here, good dame?" he said, speaking to the sick woman.

"Oh dear! no, Mr. Edmonds," replied Dame Hazlewood, "she's gone home."

"She's been gone well nigh an hour," said the other woman.

Edmonds pressed his two hands tight together, but uttered not a word. Yet the expression of anguish and alarm in his face instantly struck the woman who had last spoke, and she exclaimed, "Has the poor dear not come home?"

"No," answered Edmonds; "no, nor is she on the way."

"Perhaps you did not take the same path, Mr. Edmonds," replied the younger woman; "you might pass very close to each other without knowing it. I'm sure as I came down an hour or so ago, I should have never known that any one was along the other walk, if young Mr. Latimer had not come through the trees, and said, 'is that you Jack?'"

"Mr. Latimer is sick in bed at Brown's cottage, my good lady," said Morton, advancing. "You must be mistaken."

"Oh! no, sir;" answered Dame Hazlewood's friend. "I saw him with my own eyes. He was oddly dressed, to be sure, as if he did not wish to be known; but I'd swear to him anywhere."

"I think there must be an error," said Dr. Western; but before he concluded the sentence, Edmonds, with a flashing eye and a burning cheek, broke in upon his speech, exclaiming,

“No, no, no! It was he, sure enough. The villain has robbed me of my child—I know all about it. He has corrupted her heart, and condemned her soul; and God’s curse and her father’s be upon both their heads!”

Dr. Western laid his hand upon his arm, saying, with a grave brow and solemn tone, “Forbear, forbear!”

“I cannot, sir—I cannot!” cried Edmonds, furiously. “He has made her a lie to me; he has perverted as pure and good a girl as ever lived. She has had warning—she has had counsel—she has had her father’s commands; but she has neither honoured his nor God’s. All the persuasion of this black villain! Curses upon him—ay, and upon her too; and may they light upon my head if ever I see her again!—I will go home—I will go home, and break my poor wife’s heart with this news;” and, without waiting for remonstrance or reproof, he flung out of the cottage, crossed the road, mounted the stile, and entered the park.

CHAPTER V.

"THIS young man is incorrigible, I fear," said Morton, after a pause. "Such conduct shows a spirit too corrupt and perverted to admit even the hope of reformation."

"We must always hope," replied Dr. Western, "but this indeed is very bad. I know not well what is to be done; for in order to rescue this unhappy girl from his hands, if she be inclined to stay with him, we ought to have her father's sanction."

"Had we not better follow him to his house?" asked Morton. "Perhaps, by reason and admonition, my dear sir, you might induce the poor man to think better of this affair, and take the only means that can be devised for saving his child. They cannot have taken her far."

"It is vain to talk to him to-night," said Dr. Western. "His mind is in a state that will not bear it; and, whether the law will justify me or

not, I must take his consent for granted, and on my own responsibility issue a warrant against those who are supposed to have carried off this unhappy girl."

"I am sure it was the young gentleman from Mallington House," joined in the woman who was in attendance upon dame Hazlewood; "that I can swear to any where."

"Then come up to the rectory early to-morrow, Mrs. Wilson," said Dr. Western. "I will issue the warrant to-night at all risks, but in the mean time inquire amongst your neighbours as to which way Lucy and her seducer went, and if you gain any information let me know. They could not have gone out by the great gates or we must have met them."

"And they did not come over the stile, I am sure," said Mrs. Wilson, "for the door hadn't been shut two minutes before you came in, sir."

"Do you remember having seen a boat cross the river?" asked Morton.

Dr. Western bowed his head with a meaning look, but merely replied, "We had better get home as soon as possible. Remember to send me any information you may obtain, Mrs. Wilson, without a moment's delay."

The good woman promised to obey, and the two gentlemen quitting the cottage, returned

through the park, conversing over what had taken place.

"This is sad, very sad, indeed," said Dr. Western; "and this, my dear young friend, is that which forms the most painful part of a clergyman's existence, to see every admonition and every effort to check the wild course of passion and folly by the restraints of religion, vain and empty! Here this poor girl, Lucy, has been a regular attendant upon my church. I have spoken with her and her family often in private. I have endeavoured to give them on all occasions such counsel and admonition as I thought would lead them right; and yet, I cannot but fear that I have not done enough, and that a share of this fault may rest with me for negligence."

"Nay, nay, my dear friend," replied Morton; "such, I am sure, is not the case. You must remember that prophets and preachers from the beginning of time have striven in vain to restrain the force of human passion. All that we can do is to labour as far as we have strength; and very often that labour will be unsuccessful. But perhaps," he continued, willing to lead the conversation away from the points that were most painful to his companion, "we may be judging harshly of this poor girl—we may be even doing wrong to Alfred Latimer himself. That good woman may be mistaken; or, if not, some violence

may have been used. Do you not remember I thought I heard a scream as we were walking from the park-keeper's cottage up to the Hall?"

"I do, I do," answered Dr. Western; "and though it may seem strange to say so, I would rather have it as you suppose than otherwise—I would rather have this poor Lucy injured in body than in spirit."

"I can understand you perfectly, my dear friend," replied Morton; "but in regard to Alfred Latimer, do not let us give way too much to prejudice. This Mrs. Wilson may, as I have said, be in error. She saw the person whom she suspects to have been him but for a moment. It was nearly dark when she met him; he has no good reputation with the country people any more than with ourselves; and the resemblance may have been fanciful entirely. This morning he was certainly ill in bed; and I think it will be best, while you return home and take measures for apprehending those who have committed this outrage, for me to walk up to the common, and ascertain whether he be really there or not. Till that is ascertained our dear Louisa had better not be informed of what has occurred, as it would only fill her with painful suspicions, which after all may be unfounded."

Dr. Western offered some opposition to his

young companion's plan, alleging that he might involve himself in a quarrel with Alfred Latimer, which might have very painful consequences. But Morton, sure of his own calmness and self-command, persisted in his design, and they walked on together towards the little town of Mallington, where all was calm and tranquil, the lights shining forth from the windows, and many of the inhabitants standing out before their doors, or strolling through the street to enjoy the sweet air of a night scarcely touched with the approach of autumn. The moon was rising large and round, as the two gentlemen crossed the bridge; and her light struggling with some clouds, as she ascended the arch of heaven, fell in patches of wavy silver upon the waters, and on the broad leaves of the water-lilies that here and there spread out from the banks; but neither Morton nor Dr. Western had any inclination to pause and gaze at a prospect which at another time they might have stayed long to contemplate. The heart of each felt too dark and gloomy for the beauty of the scene to find its way in; and hurrying on into Mallington, Morton left the worthy rector at the inn to summon the constables of the place, and take such other measures as were necessary for the restoration of Lucy Edmonds to her home, while he

himself walked on up the hill, and with a rapid pace bent his steps to the cottage of the Widow Brown. As he went he met several men returning from a work at a distance, and when the moon shone out so that they could see the general appearance of the gentleman whom they passed, they civilly gave him good-night, with that decent respect for superior station which was then general, and is not altogether extinguished in England; but the clouds still from time to time completely covered the fair planet, and even the sandy path from the high road to the cottage was then with difficulty to be distinguished.

At the door of Widow Brown's house, Morton knocked before he entered, and at first no answer was returned; but upon repeating the summons, the voice of the old woman herself was heard, in a harsh tone, exclaiming, "Come in! Why the devil do you stand knocking there?"

On Morton's entrance she seemed both surprised and annoyed, but changed her tone to a more civil one as she asked what was his pleasure.

"I wish to see Mr. Latimer, my good dame," replied Morton; "shall I find him in the next room?"

Mother Brown hesitated, and, probably, if she had possessed any means of preventing her

visitor from satisfying himself she would have said that the young gentleman was asleep. Certain it is that the lie first rose to her lips ; but remembering that she was alone, and could not stop Mr. Morton from going on into the adjoining room if he thought fit, she replied, "He has gone out upon the common, sir, to take a little walk in the moonlight. He thought it would do him good, poor gentleman."

With this confirmation of the suspicions which had been entertained against Mrs. Charlton's son, Morton did not think fit to ask any more questions, but merely answering, "Well, tell him I called to see him," he turned and left the cottage.

There had been a light within, and a cloud was just coming over the moon, the silvery edge resting half over her disc affording a gleam, which lasted but a moment, however, till the dark vapour swept across and cast its shadows upon the earth. During that moment Morton thought that he caught sight of a man's head and shoulders just rising above the edge of the neighbouring pit ; but he was not one easily to apprehend any danger, and he walked quietly on, merely noticing that the figure disappeared more suddenly than could be accounted for by the increased darkness produced by the cloud ;

for the brightness of the sky around afforded sufficient light to see, though indistinctly. Scarcely had he passed the spot, however, where the man's head and shoulders had appeared, when he heard a sound like gravel falling from the bank into the pit below, under the tread of some one springing up, and he was instinctively turning round towards the side whence the noise proceeded when he received a violent blow on the head which laid him stunned and bleeding on the ground.

CHAPTER VI.

WE must look back for an hour or two, dear reader, to the period when about sunset a boat crossed the river from the Mallington side to the sedgy piece of ground which we have more than once alluded to.

The boat reached the shore, and was drawn into a little sort of muddy creek, where several large old willows hid it from observation. There, one of the two men which it contained jumped on shore; and the other laid his head upon the raised part of the stern, and seemed to dispose himself to sleep. The other—in whom it required an eye well acquainted with his person to recognise Alfred Latimer—walked on, till he reached the path. Thence, after looking round him for a minute or two, he crossed through the shrubs and underwood to the other footway. There he paused for some minutes, looking up the path with an impatient glance, and muttering

to himself with an oath, "Jack Williams is devilish late—I wonder what is keeping him. Hark! there's a step;" and hurrying through the trees again, he exclaimed, incautiously, "Is that you, Jack?"

The moment he beheld Dame Wilson, however, he withdrew before he thought she could notice him, and then listened for her retreating footfalls. He then turned along the path in the direction of the Hall, retrod his steps again, and was once more wheeling round, when, without having heard any one approach, he found Jack Williams by his side.

"Why, this isn't the place, Mr. Latimer," said Williams, in a low voice; "if you don't mind what you're about she will pass without your seeing her; quick, get through the trees, and look out on that other road."

"Come along, then," said Alfred Latimer, "I did not know which path it was upon."

"No, go yourself first," replied Williams, in the same quick manner; "try to persuade her, first, gently; I will be close at hand."

The young gentleman, following this counsel, crossed once more through the trees, while Williams hid himself in the brushwood and listened. Several minutes elapsed, however, before Lucy herself appeared, and Alfred Latimer

was beginning to think that she must have passed, when he suddenly caught sight of her, coming with faint and agitated steps along the side of the marsh. He instantly sprang forward to meet her; but, though joy at seeing him was upon poor Lucy's countenance, her first words were—"Oh! Mr. Latimer, I promised never to meet you again."

"You have done so by accident, Lucy," said Alfred Latimer, taking her hand, and pressing it in his; "they cannot blame you; and, indeed, if you had been wise, and loved me as I once thought you did, no one would have any right to blame you—for you would now be my wife."

"Oh, Alfred!" replied Lucy, looking up in his face with a reproachful glance, "you know too well"—but she did not finish the sentence, and he went on.

"You would have me believe that you do love me, Lucy," he said; "but how can I think so when, for a mere rash whim of your father's—a hatred of me without a cause—you not only make me miserable, but drive me to all sorts of rash things. See what your unkindness has already brought about. Have I not quarrelled with my mother, gone to London, half-ruined myself, and then, in coming down like a madman to seek you, because I was informed that your

father was going to marry you to another, have I not been dashed almost to pieces ? ”

Poor Lucy wept, but through her tears she answered, “ No, no, Alfred ; I will never marry another.”

“ Then be mine now, dearest Lucy,” replied Alfred Latimer, pressing her closer to him. “ We have now the opportunity. Do not let us lose it. And then my heart will be at rest, and no one can tease you any more to be another’s wife. I have a boat here which will carry us across the river in two minutes. Then I have got the pretty cottage for you that stands away at the back of the common, where you can be quiet and peaceable all night, and to-morrow we can go away to a distance and be married immediately—come, dear Lucy, come ! ”

“ Oh, no, no ! ” murmured Lucy Edmonds, striving to free herself from his arms as he would have drawn her towards the river side, “ I must not—I dare not, Alfred.”

“ What, when I have risen from a sick-bed to come and ask you at the risk of life ! ” exclaimed Alfred Latimer, impetuously. “ Is this love, Lucy ? Is this affection ? ”

“ You know I love you,” she answered, “ but my father—my mother—I cannot, I ought not—oh ! I do love you truly, but ”—

At that moment Williams appeared suddenly from amongst the trees, and though his touch was not rough as he took her by the arm, the surprise and terror of the moment, called a scream from her lips.

"Come, come, Miss Edmonds," he said, "there is no use of resisting—one can see well enough how your heart leads you, and it is too late to fight with it now. Mr. Latimer has promised to marry you, in my hearing, and he will keep his word. Do not keep us here till people come, and we get into a row, where some of us may lose our lives. Do kindly what you must do, and think what would befall if your father were to come up just now."

As he spoke he aided Latimer in drawing her along towards the boat, but his last words seemed to have more effect on Lucy Edmonds than anything else. Before, she had resisted, though but feebly; but at the thought of her father's appearance at that moment, and all the consequences that might ensue, she murmured, "Oh, Heaven forbid!" and looking wildly round, suffered them to lead her on without further opposition. In another minute she was seated in the punt, which was immediately pushed off by the man Brown, and was soon in the midst of the river. Supported by Alfred Latimer, she sat with her hands cover-

ing her eyes, and the tears streaming through her fingers as the boat glided over the chequered surface of the waters, now rippling in the moonlight, now shadowed by the clouds. It took but a minute or two to cross, and as soon as the punt touched the ground, and the man Brown had jumped out and moored it by the chain, Alfred Latimer carried rather than led the poor girl to the shore, and then endeavoured to support her trembling form upon his arm. But Lucy could hardly stand, and was still less able to walk, so that they were obliged to pause for a minute or two, nearly at the spot where Louisa Charlton had plunged in to save the unhappy girl's brother. They had not been long there when they heard the sound of voices from the other side. Lucy recognised her father's tones; but it was too late now she thought to hesitate or to resist. The die was cast; her fate for weal or woe was sealed, and the voice which had once been so pleasant to her ear, now brought nothing but terror; yet it was the terror which gives strength, and not which overpowers, and with a great effort she said, "I can go! I can go! Oh, Heaven! do not let them find us."

With her lover supporting her on one side, and Williams on the other, while the man Brown followed lest his aid should be needed, Lucy

advanced along the road which led towards the back of the common, with her heart beating fearfully and her breath coming short. At length she paused for a while, saying, "A moment, Alfred!—a moment! I will go on again in a moment!"

They all stopped in silence; and, as they waited, the gay sound of village mirth reached them from Mallington.

Oh, how sad it came upon poor Lucy's ear!—It seemed to tell her, with a prophetic voice, that the light laugh, the joyous merriment, was no more to be her portion upon earth; that she was given over to heart-sinking despondency, to self-reproach and sadness; that the peace and the pleasure, the calm night, the contented day, the spirit at rest, and the bosom without care, were all gone for ever! But there is something even in such dark and powerful convictions which gives a vigour, though it be the vigour of despair. She was anxious to fly from all sounds that she had loved, for they seemed to ring the knell of departed days; and saying in a low tone, "Now, Alfred, I can go," she resumed her way up the hill.

The walk was a long one, for the cottage which Williams had hired for Alfred Latimer was at least two miles distant from Mallington; but Lucy Edmonds stopped no more.

At length the cottage door was reached, but the windows were all dark and cheerless. There was no light within any more than in her own heart ; and though the leaves of the woodbine and the rose climbed over the little trellised porch, and reached their fibres up to the thatch, they seemed like nightshade to poor Lucy Edmonds, as she waited while Williams drew the key from his pocket and opened the door. He had caused everything to be prepared, however, with some care and neatness. Candles stood upon the table, which were soon lighted, showing a neatly furnished room, and various provisions upon the shelves and tables around. But Lucy marked none of these things. It was of leaving her father's house she thought ; of disobeying his command ; of never seeing his face again ; of being no longer pressed to her mother's bosom ; of the breaking of all the fond ties of youth ; of the loss of all the dear affections of early days : and when she looked around all seemed desolation.

Alfred Latimer led her to a chair, and seated her with her hand in his ; but Williams, approaching one of the shelves, took down a bottle of wine, and pouring some out into a glass gave it to her, saying, in the kindly tone which sailors generally use to the weak and young, " Come, take that, Miss Edmonds ; you are tired and faint. It will

be all well in a day or two ; and then, when you are his wife, your father will forget and forgive, and see things very differently. Come, don't vex yourself ; for you may be very happy if you like."

Lucy took the wine and drank it. She would have done anything that they bade her ; but the moment after, though the hopes that Williams presented to her mind cheered her for an instant, the voice of the man Brown, who had just entered, made her start, and turn round with terror.

" I shouldn't mind a glass, too," he said ; " for it's a long walk. Come, pour us out some, Jack," and his words and his appearance brought a new source of apprehension into Lucy's mind. What were these comrades of the man she loved ? Who were these familiar friends with whom he consorted ? Were these the companions of the son of a high race ? Were these the persons he trusted and esteemed ?

Williams, however, answered nothing to the ruffian's speech, but spoke eagerly for a few minutes in a low voice to Alfred Latimer, urging him apparently to some course which he did not think fit to pursue. " Well," he said at length, " you are not right—but we had better go. Only remember your promise, Mr. Latimer. Come, Brown," and Lucy Edmonds was left alone with Alfred Latimer.

Williams and his companion, Brown, then mounted the little bank under which the cottage lay, and came upon the common above. There was a small public-house at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, at the door of which Brown stopped, declaring that, as he had been bilked of his wine, the other should treat him to a glass of spirits; and, going in, he tossed off more than half a pint of the liquid fire, which is but too readily to be found in such places. He was inclined to stop and gossip with some loose characters whom they found in the parlour; but the superior ruffian with whom he was associated for the time, forced him out, and took the way with him towards his mother's hut. The man had been drinking before, and the spirits he had taken had some effect, not in inebriating, but in raising his dull nature into something approaching a brutal sort of energy.

"Hang me!" he said, as they walked along, "if I should not like to have a spree of some kind to-night. I wish it was the pheasant season, I would clear out Master Edmonds' covers for him while he's piping after his daughter."

"Go home, and go to bed, you fool," said Williams in a surly tone. "When you do anything of that kind, have your head clear, and don't go drinking and then talking as loud as a babbling old woman in a passion."

The other man felt his own inferiority sufficiently to be silent, though he was not very well pleased with his companion's words ; and thus they proceeded till they came to the clump of old fir-trees, about a couple of hundred yards distant from mother Brown's dwelling, where her son caught hold of Williams's arm, saying in a lower tone than he had used before, " D—n me, if there isn't somebody walking up to the house ! If it's some one come after young Latimer, this job will all be blown."

" Some of the servants, I dare say," replied Williams, looking towards the house. " I hope your mother won't be fool enough to say he's out."

" Why, what would you have her say ?" asked her son.

" Can't she say he's asleep ?" rejoined Williams ; but just then, a gleam of moonlight passing over the figure they had seen, he added, " It doesn't look like a servant either."

" I know who it is," said Tom Brown ; " d—n him he is always meddling, and I'll break his head some day."

" If you mean Gibbs, you are mistaken, Tom," replied Williams.

" I know what I mean," rejoined the other in a mysterious tone ; " and, if that fellow finds that

the young cove is out, you'll have the whole story ferreted out. But come into the gravel-pit, Jack ; and wait till he is gone."

They then approached the house, and descended into a pit which lay at the side of the road from mother Brown's cottage to Mallington. There Williams seated himself at the bottom of the bank ; but Brown climbed up till he could see over, and his companion remarked that he sought out a large stone, which he held tight in his right hand, holding by the turf above with his left.

"Come, no nonsense, Tom," said Williams, "let us hear what you are going to be after."

"Nothing, but look out," replied Tom Brown ; and immediately added, "he's gone in."

A pause of about half a minute ensued, and then the ruffian above said in a low voice to him below, "He has come out again. He has found it all out, or I'm —— ;" and, at the same moment, he drew himself back as if about to descend.

"Come down, Tom," said Williams ; "no more work to-night. We have enough upon our hands for once." But almost at the same moment Brown scrambled up without reply, and his companion heard a blow and a fall. All was silent, however ; and, springing up the bank like a squirrel, Williams stood upon the common just as the moon was coming out again from behind the

quick passing cloud. Tom Brown was standing at three or four paces distance ; and Morton, with his hat knocked off, was stretched upon the ground, with his face upon the grass.

CHAPTER VII.

THE appearance of Dr. Western in the village inn, and his immediately sending for the constable of Mallington, fluttered good poor Mrs. Pluckrose a great deal; nor was her agitation diminished when the worthy clergyman, having taken his seat in a vacant parlour, proceeded to inquire particularly into her knowledge of a certain Jack Williams, and of his usual haunts and places of resort.

In a very confused and unsatisfactory manner, the landlady communicated all she knew of Williams, his drinking bout with Mr. Gibbs, and the state in which the latter had been left and still remained. She averred, however, that Williams, on quitting her house, had gone up the hill towards the common. This statement was confirmed by the ostler, who added, in answer to further questions from Dr. Western, that since Mr. Latimer's accident, Williams had hired a room at the house of a man named Picket, in the lane just opposite to Mallington House.

Nothing had been seen of Mr. Latimer, by any of the people of the inn, since the accident ; and, just as the good doctor's inquiries were drawing to a close, the constable made his appearance ; a keen stout man, with hawk's nose, and a pair of sharp bright eyes, not altogether parallel in their direction. The degree of obliquity which they possessed could hardly be called a squint, but nevertheless, the effect was a certain cunning and not very satisfactory expression, which conveyed to the mind of the beholder, perhaps wrongly, the idea of a shrewd but not very sincere character. His own interests, of which he had a very tolerable notion, generally kept his conduct, indeed, more straightforward than his look ; and, trusting to this tie, Dr. Western and the other magistrates in the neighbourhood generally relied upon him with confidence ; nor had they ever hitherto had occasion to repent of so doing.

In the present instance Dr. Western communicated to him what had occurred ; directed him to take two or three stout fellows from the village, and, without the loss of a moment, to use his best endeavours for discovering where poor Lucy Edmonds had been taken. He further ordered him, if successful in his search, to bring her to the Rectory whatever the hour might be ; and, more-

over, to apprehend any one whom he had reason to believe was a participant in her abduction from her father's protection, and to lodge them in the cage for the night.

Harry Soames scratched his head at the idea of these vigorous measures. "Well, your reverence knows best," he said, "what's law and what's not; but if every young man was apprehended for playing the fool with a pretty girl, the cage would be desperate full, I've a notion. I can't help thinking that Miss Lucy's gone willingly enough, though your reverence seems to think not. I've seen young Master Latimer more nor once a-hanging about after her: she was precious fond of him, too; as well she might be of such a young gentleman. Am I to take him up if I find him with her?"

"You are to make no distinction of persons whatsoever," replied Dr. Western, not very well satisfied with his constable's notions of morality. "I suspect, as you do, that Mr. Latimer may have had something to do with this affair; and, although I have not sufficient proof of the fact to give you a warrant against him, yet I will furnish you with full authority to act in the manner I have directed, and the responsibility will rest upon me, not upon you. Bring me a pen and ink."

While the man was gone, the rector took from his pocket-book some blank warrants; and though

somewhat puzzled how to fill them up in a case of a character with which he was not accustomed to deal, yet resolved rather to run the risk of overstepping the law than suffer a great wrong to be committed where he could prevent it, he drew the warrant in the best manner he could devise, and placed it in the constable's hands, repeating his order to lose no time.

This being done he issued forth from the inn, and took his way home to the Rectory, where he found that his young friend Morton had not yet arrived. The events which had occurred, and the business in which he had been engaged, had left a grave and melancholy shade upon his countenance, which was remarked both by his sister and Miss Charlton. Each was somewhat surprised, too, to see him return alone; and though Louisa did not venture to inquire the cause of Morton's absence, Mrs. Evelyn did. Her brother's reply, that he had gone to make some inquiries and would soon rejoin them, satisfied the two ladies that nothing had gone amiss in that quarter; but still the anxious look of the worthy old clergyman, the sudden and expectant turn of his head when he heard the gate bell ring, and the unusual degree of restlessness which he displayed, somewhat alarmed both of his fair companions.

It had been arranged, that Dr. Western was to

walk up with Louisa and Mr. Morton to Mallington House about ten o'clock, but that hour had not yet arrived when the sound of a vehicle driving up was heard, and in a minute or two after, the rector's servant announced that the chariot had come for Miss Charlton.

"Why, we told them that we would walk," replied Dr. Western; "and Mr. Morton is not yet returned."

"Mr. Morton is up at the house, sir," answered the man, "and not quite well—so Jones says."

Louisa's cheek turned very pale; and the good clergyman, feeling for her anxiety, and knowing that few evils are equal to suspense, inquired at once, "What is the matter? Did the coachman say?"

"Why, sir, he told me," replied the servant, "that Mr. Morton had been knocked down upon the common, and had been helped home by a man of the name of Williams. Mr. Nethersole had bled him, and he was better; and begged Jones to say he was not much hurt."

Louisa Charlton's heart sunk, and her spirit seemed to ask itself if this were the beginning of a fresh course of sorrows—if the new path which she had opened for herself was already presenting the thorns that are destined to obstruct all human enjoyment. She did not give way, indeed: the

paleness of her cheek, and a certain apprehensive look in her beautiful eyes, were the only indications which showed, to the two kind friends who watched her, how deeply she felt. But Dr. Western understood it all; and, laying his hand gently upon her arm, he said, "I will go with you, my dear child. I must see into this affair myself. Outrages are becoming somewhat too frequent here, though, I doubt not, our young friend is not much hurt."

On the way up to Mallington House, which occupied a considerable time, from the steepness of the hill, Dr. Western spoke cheerfully to his fair companion, trying to divert her mind from apprehensions for her lover to any other topic; but it was evident from her replies, though they were calm and reasonable, that her mind was still busy with the one engrossing subject, and at length Dr. Western returned to it boldly, saying, "Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily, my love. Grievs and anxieties are more or less the portion of every one, but it is our duty not to hasten them by anticipation, nor increase them by apprehensions."

Louisa replied by assuring him that she strove as far as possible to keep her mind easy, and the moment after the carriage drove through the gates and stopped at the door of the house. We will not pause to analyse poor Louisa's feelings,

nor to tell how they varied at every step which that pretty little foot set upon the stairs, till at the drawing-room door she had nearly dropped fainting on the carpet. By a strong effort of the mind, however, she contrived to regain some command over herself; and opening the door, went in. There sat Mrs. Charlton, at a table quietly writing a note, with an air of the most complete composure possible—very pretty, very well dressed, and very placid, she was the complete antithesis to all poor Louisa's feelings; and it must be confessed that, though our sweet friend was the least splenetic person in the world, she felt almost provoked, as well as a little ashamed, at the contrast between her own agitation and her step-mother's profound tranquillity.

Intense selfishness is a very excellent thing—in some respects—for those who possess it; for although they may be very sensitive upon the one central spot, yet, at every other point, where all the rest of the world are vulnerable, they are guarded with triple steel. I wonder when Lord Bacon wrote his essay upon the wisdom of the ancients, he did not show that the character of Achilles was a mere allegory of the blind Greek to represent a perfectly selfish man; for there cannot be the slightest doubt that such was the

case. Take his whole history, and it is evident; first, he was dipped in Styx, that hellish stream which rendered him invulnerable to all the slings and arrows of the general enemy. There was but one point in which he could be wounded, and that was the lowest point of his whole frame, his right heel. What could this mean but that he could not be reached through the head or the heart? This gave him very great advantages over all his companions, and he was able to overcome, and even kill, a great many much better men than himself; but still it did not secure him happiness, nor obtain for him ultimate success. What a fine moral to the allegory!—and at length a Phrygian boy, in a night cap, found out the weak point, and despatched him with a missile!

However, Mrs. Charlton was a perfect Achilles in her way; she was quite invulnerable upon all points but self; and, although it would not have suited her purposes at this time to have had Mr. Morton killed outright, yet a little bodily suffering, which might render him more interesting in Louisa's eyes, was far from giving her the slightest concern. She would have gone on writing her note, with the fortitude of a martyr, if Mr. Nethersole had been actually trepanning the skull of her guest in the next room, provided

she had been quite sure he would not die under the operation. It was her part, however, to affect a benevolent interest in Mr. Morton's situation; and as soon as she beheld Louisa, she laid down the pen with a look of concern, saying, "I did not like to shock you, my love, with the news; but our poor friend, Mr. Morton, has met with a sad accident; but do not agitate yourself, he is doing quite well. Oh! kind Dr. Western, I am glad you have come; Morton will be delighted to see you. Pray go up to him—he is in his dressing-room, and while you are gone I will tell Louisa all about it."

Dr. Western thought more than he chose to say; but, following Mrs. Charlton's suggestion, he went up to his young friend; while the worthy mistress of the house proceeded to relate to her step-daughter all the particulars of which she was aware regarding Morton's adventure.

Hearing voices speaking within, Dr. Western knocked at the dressing-room door before he entered, and on going in found Morton seated in an arm chair in his dressing-gown, with Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, beside him. The young gentleman's face was pale and his head had a bandage round it, but he received the worthy clergyman with a smile, saying, "Hard blows

seem somewhat rife in your neighbourhood, my dear doctor, but this will prove of no consequence, I am sure, and I hope that Miss Charlton has not been alarmed."

"A good deal," replied Dr. Western, who thought fit to speak guardedly in the presence of the surgeon. "I dare say, however," he continued, "that the report of our good friend here will remove her apprehension, if he can, as I trust, conscientiously tell her there is no danger."

"I see none," replied Mr. Nethersole, rising at the doctor's hint, "and I trust in Mr. Morton to find a more tractable patient than Mr. Latimer has proved."

"Stay a moment, Mr. Nethersole," said Morton, "I think that your knowledge of the country, and of what is taking place amongst the people round, may give Dr. Western and myself some insight into the matter which took me up to the common where I received this blow."

"I cannot have you enter into any business to-night, sir," replied Mr. Nethersole, struggling between a certain degree of curiosity and a sense of professional duty. "Perhaps Dr. Western can explain the affair to me."

Morton whispered a few words to Dr. Western, who exclaimed, "Yes, yes, he will be able to tell

us more than any one. So he was out?—Then it is clearly as we thought:” and turning to the surgeon, he informed him of all that had taken place in regard to poor Lucy Edmonds, and inquired whether anything had come to his knowledge which might direct them in their search for her. So well, however, had Williams laid his plans, that even to the ears of Mr. Nethersole not a hint had arrived which could give them any insight into the events of that night; but, relying upon all the various petty sources of information which were at his command, the worthy surgeon promised boldly to bring them tidings of the whole affair by the next morning. He then added a warning, that quiet was absolutely necessary for Mr. Morton, and descended to the drawing-room to make his report to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa.

The conversation between Morton and Dr. Western, after the surgeon had left them, took a sort of zig-zag course between the two principal events of the night, sometimes turning to Mallington Park, sometimes resting upon Mallington Common. Into the assault which had been committed upon the person of his young friend, Dr. Western inquired as a magistrate, hinting plainly that he strongly suspected that the act had been perpetrated by Williams who had by no means

cleared himself to the doctor's full satisfaction from the charge of having knocked down and plundered worthy Mr. Gibbs.

Morton, however, rejected the idea at once, exclaiming, "Oh! no, my dear sir, that is quite out of the question. For several minutes I remained quite stunned; and when I recovered my recollection, I found this very man bathing my head with water, which he had brought up in his leathern hat. He told me he had found me there as he was walking home, and had seen a man go away from the spot as he came up. Now, I saw the man too, who did it—at least I can have no doubt of the fact—and he was much taller than this Williams, though not so stout and broadly built."

Dr. Western shook his head, still unconvinced. and proceeded to inquire into all the particulars, asking, amongst other questions, whether in this case, as in that of Mr. Gibbs, the act of violence had been accompanied by robbery?

"I suppose so," replied Morton; "but I really have not had time to ascertain the fact. The sum I had upon me, however, was very small, and, by looking in my pockets, the fact will soon be ascertained."

He rose as he spoke to examine as he proposed, but sat down again immediately, feeling

himself giddy ; and Dr. Western brought him his coat and waistcoat, which had been cast down upon a chair. His watch had not been taken, but his purse was gone, and when he came to put his hand into the pocket of his coat, his brow contracted. "My pocket-book is gone," he said, looking at Dr. Western, "and with it the papers I took, thinking they might be necessary in the inquiry we were making this evening."

"That is unfortunate, indeed !" exclaimed the clergyman, "but they were copies, were they not ?"

"In most cases, the originals," replied Morton. "They must be recovered by some means."

"They can be of no use to any one else," said Dr. Western ; "so that, doubtless, if we offer a reward they will be restored."

"We must couple that offer," answered Morton, "with an engagement to ask no questions. Perhaps, it might be as well to have an officer down from London. They are as much accustomed to negotiate with thieves as to apprehend them."

Knowing the great importance of the papers which had been taken, and feeling what must be the effect of the loss upon his young friend's mind, Dr. Western did his best to persuade him that they would be easily regained ; and having

succeeded in some degree, the worthy clergyman left Morton to repose, and proceeded to say a word or two of comfort to Louisa before he returned to the Rectory.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE left Alfred Latimer alone in the cottage with Lucy Edmonds, little more than an hour after sunset. It was near midnight when he came forth again, and he took his way, with a hurried and irregular step, over the moor. He watched not the clouds rushing across the sky; he marked not the light of the declining moon while it played as if in living sport with the shadows that swept by over bush and tree, and green grass and yellow road, and deep pit and glistening pool, but with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his hand thrust into his bosom, on he went, without pause, till he came within sight of the cottage where he had been carried after the accident which had befallen the chaise. There for an instant he stopped, put his hand to his head, and thought. He then went on again quickly, and entered.

There was but one person in the little room;

and that was the man Williams, who was seated gloomily at the table, smoking a short pipe.

"Ah! you've come back at last," he said abruptly; "this is all very wrong, Mr. Latimer, I know what you will say; but it's all nonsense. If she is to stay there the night alone, it is no matter whether it be an hour or two longer or not. However, there are other things to think of. The matter's blown all over the place; and there have been people up here seeking you. They have been up at my house, too, but I was not fool enough to be out of the way; and Soames, the constable, and half a dozen others, have been beating about for you as if you were a cock pheasant under a hollybush."

"Who came up here?" demanded Alfred Latimer, not a little alarmed at what he heard. "What the devil has the constable to do with it? Who can stop me from taking the girl if she is willing to go with me?"

"The magistrates say they can," answered Williams, "and they have issued a warrant against you, but Soames is in no great hurry in executing it; for he is not particularly fond of Master Edmonds. So you've got till to-morrow morning to get poor Lucy away into another county till you can be married, and that matter set all right."

Alfred Latimer made no reply, but looked down upon the table, and twisted some white ashes which had fallen from his companion's pipe into a heap between his finger and thumb.

"As to who was seeking you up here," continued Williams, after a moment's pause, "it was the gentleman who is staying at your mother's; and that old idiot, Mother Brown, told him you were out. Then her son, a greater fool still, chose to make the matter worse by knocking him down on the common. I found him stunned, and took him home, so there will be a fine work about it, you may be sure, and I'd advise you to get out of the county for a time as soon as you can."

"I will—I will," answered Alfred Latimer, who saw all the danger of his situation. "I can't go to-night, for Lucy must have some rest, and I must get a chaise or something to take us."

"That is soon got," replied Williams, "but you can stop till day-break and then be off. Turn in for a few hours and take some sleep; and about four I'll walk over to Long Sutton and bring a chaise for you, while you go and tell poor Lucy Edmonds to get ready."

"But are you sure to wake by that time?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I know if my head is

once laid down I shall not open an eye for many an hour."

"You have never been at sea," answered Williams; "if you show a bold heart, and carry out what we were talking of, you'll soon be like me. I could not, for my life, go on a minute beyond the hour of my watch; so do not be afraid, I'll wake you."

After a few words more, Alfred Latimer retired to the inner chamber and lay down in his clothes, but his expectations of sleeping soundly were not verified. He tossed from side to side for well nigh an hour, and during that time his thoughts turned more than once to the words which Williams had spoken—"If you show a bold heart and carry out what we were talking of"—and the wild schemes which the other had instilled into his mind presented themselves to his imagination in all the splendid colours of excitement and adventure. Yes, he thought, he would carry out what had been proposed; he would quit his native land, and on some fair foreign shore live a free and unrestrained life of pleasure and of enterprise. Why should he stay where he was? His noble race disowned him for no fault of his; his mother grudged him the pitiful supply necessary to the enjoyment of life: his little patrimony was already deeply dipped in debt. There were no prospects, no hopes

before him—he never thought of honest industry and energetic exertion—and he would go afar, taking Lucy with him to share his bold free life. Then came the question of, should he marry her? He had not got the length of answering boldly, “No!” but he resolved to think about it further; and that was quite enough to prove that the scoundrel was in full possession of his heart. When a man once asks himself if he shall keep a promise, he may tremble for his honour; but if he takes time to consider, he may write himself down a villain from that hour.

Sleep at length came, and when it did it was profound. He fancied that he had not closed his eyes more than a minute when Williams shook him by the shoulder, and told him to rise, for it was four o’clock. It was as dark as the grave—the moon had gone down, the sky was cloudy, and not the least glimmering of dawn was yet to be discerned. It is wonderful how external things give a colour to the feelings of the heart. Alfred Latimer felt the bold wild schemes which he had been indulging, chilled and dimmed by the gloomy aspect of all around him; but after a few moments’ conversation with Williams, he set off for the cottage where he had left Lucy, while his companion walked away in the direction of a neighbouring village in which was an inn that let post-horses.

Slowly and thoughtfully Alfred Latimer walked on in the darkness, internally cursing his own folly in not having returned at once to Mother Brown's cottage as soon as Lucy had been carried away, and pouring out still more bitter imprecations upon the man Brown for his attack upon Morton; though he did not fail, at the same time, to comment upon what he termed Mr. Morton's impertinence, in endeavouring to ascertain where he had passed the night.

Nor must it be supposed for one moment that Mr. Latimer's indignation at Tom Brown originated in any feeling for Morton, or that he felt grieved that a gentleman from whom he had received more than one proof of kindness had been injured. Not in the least. That was not a part of the young gentleman's character; his selfishness was not less than his fair mother's, though it assumed a different form. Morton might have had his brains knocked out, without calling for any other observation from Alfred Latimer than "poor devil!" or something tantamount. But Brown's violence he saw might lead to a good deal of noise and investigation; and therefore—but from that cause alone—he would willingly have inflicted upon Brown even a more severe chastisement than his offence merited.

As he walked on, the darkness somewhat

diminished : there was a sort of grey light began to steal through the blackness of night ; and when he reached the bank which sheltered the cottage, he could see a golden gleam coming on some of the clouds at the horizon's edge. He paused and looked at it as it extended, like the first glimmering of heavenly light upon a long darkened mind. He looked up at the cottage, too, as the dawn began to display its closed shutters and rustic porch, covered with climbing plants. It all looked peaceful and calm. There is no heart without some softer point ; and as he stood and gazed while the light spread rosy over head, he thought of her within, and her young gentleness, with feelings of tenderness—almost of compassion. Some sensations of compunction came over him, and he murmured, “ Well, I will marry her as I promised.”

Then he gazed at the cottage again, and paused awhile, saying, “ I dare say she is asleep ! ”

He little knew Lucy Edmonds, to think that she could sleep.

At length he knocked with his hand, having told her to lock the door, when he left her. But there was no answer, and turning the handle to shake it, so as to rouse her, he found the door open, and went in. Lucy was kneeling beside her bed, exactly in the same guise as the night

before, with her head and arms resting on the bed-clothes, and her face buried in them. The heaving of her frame showed that she was still weeping; and Alfred Latimer raised her up, and strove to comfort her. The first words he spoke were the best that he could have chosen for that purpose, though they were simply suggested by the circumstances of the moment, "Come, Lucy, come!" he said, "do not go on crying; but prepare to come away with me immediately, for the people have found out all, and we must be off into another county directly, or they will take you away, and stop our marriage. Once we are married, you know, they have no power over you."

"Oh, that we were!" cried Lucy Edmonds, drying her tears; "but how can we go?"

"I have sent for a chaise, dear girl," replied her lover. "Hark! I think I hear it coming. Get ready—there's a love."

"I will be ready in a moment," answered Lucy; "I will but wash my eyes."

"I will go out, and see if that be it," said Alfred Latimer; and walking into the road he took a step or two up the little declivity, where, as soon as his head was above the slope, he saw the chaise coming down at great speed, with some one inside.

“Williams has come with it,” said the young gentleman; “I am glad of that.” And thus thinking, he turned back, and entered the little passage of the house.

The chaise drove up at the same time, but the voice of Williams saying to some one, “Well, sir, we don’t go any farther: now, you must walk straight on; and then, the first turning on the left brings you to Mallington;” caused Alfred Latimer to look round, when to his surprise he beheld the face of Captain Tankerville.

CHAPTER IX.

THE sight of Captain Tankerville's face was by no means agreeable to Alfred Latimer. He remembered instantaneously a promise which he had made and not fulfilled, regarding a certain sum of fifty pounds which it was not very pleasant for him to part with; and he would willingly have retreated into the house, but he was not quick enough to escape the shrewd eyes of his former fellow-prisoner, who at once replied to the directions given to him by Jack Williams, saying, "I have no need to go to Mallington, for the person I came to seek is here."

There was a sneer in his tone which irritated the already excited feelings of Alfred Latimer; and, giving up the plan which the first impulse led him to pursue, he advanced at once, saying, boldly, "I presume you mean me, Captain Tankerville; but I am too busy at present to hold much conversation with you."

"Our conversation need be very short, Mr. Latimer," replied Tankerville, walking up to him; "I come to ask if you remember having promised me a loan of fifty pounds, and if you are ready and willing to perform it now?"

"And what if I say no?" asked Alfred Latimer, put upon his metal by the presence of Williams, as well as by the tone which the other assumed. "I am not a man to be bullied, Captain Tankerville. What if I say no?"

"Why, then all I can say for you is, that you are a pitiful scoundrel, and that you are scarcely worth the horsewhipping which I shall give you," replied the captain.

"Hush, hush!" cried Williams; "if the matter's to take such a course as that, we had better move further off. It doesn't do to talk of such things with a lady near."

Alfred Latimer nodded his head, and pointed to Tankerville to go on up to the path, which, after a moment's consideration, he did. The young gentleman followed, with a look towards the house, and Jack Williams strode on by his side, saying, in a whisper, "You should keep your promise at all events, Mr. Latimer."

"I would if he had spoken civilly," replied the other, "but I won't be bullied by him or any man."

"That's all right," replied Williams; "but yet you should find some way of keeping your promise, too."

Alfred Latimer did not answer for a moment or two; but then he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his pocket-book, saying, "I'll tell you what, Williams, I'll give you the fifty pounds, and then you can let him have it, whatever comes of it, for hang me, if he talks in this way, if I don't have a shot at him."

"That's the way you gentlemen settle these things," replied Williams, with a grim smile, "and perhaps it's as good as any other. But here we are out of sight of the cottage, and so you can have it out with him. I'll see to this," he continued, taking three notes which the young gentleman handed to him; "and now you can talk to him with a cool face."

By this time Captain Tankerville had halted at about fifty paces before them, and the other two joined him without delay, Alfred Latimer walking up to him with a firm and decided air, which is not without its effect upon bullies of all kinds.

"You talked of horsewhipping me, Captain Tankerville," he said—"that is all nonsense; for, in the first place, you have not got a horsewhip with you; and, in the next, that is a game that

two can play at ; but if you think I have done you any wrong, I am quite ready to settle the affair with you, as gentlemen usually do."

"When and where?" asked the captain, with a sneer upon his lip. "You are what our good bailiffs call a slippery customer."

"Here, this minute," replied Latimer, stung to the quick; "here I say."

"Ah! that's only because you think I have not the means of taking you at your word; but I'll show you that you are mistaken," was Tankerville's reply; and, putting his hands into his pockets, he drew forth his pistols, and laid them down upon the turf, together with a powder flask and some balls. "You thought to get rid of me in that way, did you? You know well enough I never miss my mark."

"I've heard you say so," replied the young gentleman, glaring upon him with eyes in which there was much anger indeed but no terror, for he was now roused to a pitch of daring which even the thought of death could not affect; and, as he spoke, he drew forth his pocket handkerchief, and twisted it round like a rope. "There's one way, Captain Tankerville," he continued, "of making all shots equal, and ensuring fair play. So, you load one of the pistols, and I will load the other, after which you shall take one end of this hand-

kerchief and I the other ; for if you kill me, I'll be hanged if you shall kill any one else. Jack Williams, here, shall give the word ; and if either of us fires before the time, he will both bear witness and secure him."

"That's the right sort, sir," cried Williams, with a laugh. But Captain Tankerville did not seem to relish the proposal ; and, crossing his arms upon his breast, he stood gazing, with a frowning brow, at his opponent, as if considering what he should reply.

"I did not come here to commit murder," he said at length, "nor to be murdered."

"What !" cried Williams. "A man who never misses his mark does not come down to commit murder ! Pooh, nonsense ! Will you fight him over the handkerchief or not ?"

"What's that to you ?" exclaimed Tankerville. "No, I will not ; but still I say he's played me a very shabby trick."

"You shan't say that any longer," replied Williams, doubling up the notes and holding them out towards him.

"There's the money, it is not for that he stands, but of course he would not be brow-beat by a bully, and you are no better, and mayhap a bit of coward too. There, there's no use of saying any more. We have had your answer, and can't wait

palavering ; but remember, if you don't pay him within two months I'll find you out, and break every bone in your skin, if he doesn't."

There is a great difference, especially with a good marksman not very scrupulous as to taking little advantages, between a long shot at from eight to twelve paces, with an inexperienced opponent, and the very unpleasant alternative of the two ends of a pocket handkerchief. Captain Tankerville was a man of very nice calculations, and, having summed up all the *pros* and *cons* in his head, he took the money proffered ; but in order to get rid as far as possible of the appearance of sneaking, as schoolboys would call it, he exclaimed, " Why the devil, Latimer, did you not let me have the money at first ? I am sure I always wished to behave very friendly towards you ; and if you had but said a civil word we should have had no quarrel at all."

Alfred Latimer turned upon his heel, replying, with a somewhat contemptuous look, " You came down here to bully, but you mistook your man ; and you will now recollect that what I will do because I have promised it, I won't do for big words or angry looks ;" and without waiting for any further reply, he walked away with Jack Williams, leaving Tankerville to pick up the pistols and powder-flask, and stomach the

disagreeable points of his situation as best he might.

He remained gazing after them for a minute or two with an angry face ; and then, placed the implements of destruction in his pocket, muttering, " Well, perhaps I may pay you all I owe you some of these days."

With this satisfactory anticipation, which gives comfort to many a disappointed blackguard in this world, Captain Tankerville walked slowly over the moor, but he had also a still more substantial source of consolation for any mortification he might have suffered in the sum of fifty pounds which his pocket contained, and out of which he proposed to obtain some thirty or forty pleasant days ; for it never, in the slightest degree, entered into his mind to apply even a part of it to the satisfaction of his creditors with whom he had just been enabled to enter into an arrangement, as it is termed, by their discovering—somewhat too late, indeed—that, though they might keep him in prison to all eternity, they would never be a bit nearer the receipt of their money.

While this scoundrel,—one of the many whom we have had occasion to introduce into this work—and we beg the reader to remark that they were all very different scoundrels one from the other—Alfred Latimer, Jack Williams, Bill Maltby, and

the others, all being distinct varieties of that wide extended genus—was thus pondering, the other two walked on, Alfred Latimer having risen immensely in the estimation of Mr. Williams by the events which had just taken place. But Alfred Latimer had risen in his own estimation, too, though not in the best possible way. He had neither thought nor known that his resolution and vigour would go so far. He had dreamt wild dreams, indeed, of bold and daring actions; but they had all wanted confirmation; and now they had it. He had been tried; his courage had been found equal to the occasion: and he had taken his place as one who would shrink from nothing that passion or necessity required. There are two paths before every man, the right and the wrong one; and every fresh power of mind or body that he acquires or discovers, but hurries him on, at every step, farther and farther from the one he has not chosen. It was so with Alfred Latimer.

While, with a firm and confident step, however, he was walking on towards the cottage, Jack Williams, of all men in the world, thought fit to read him a lesson in his own peculiar code of morality. "That was excellently done, Mr. Latimer," he said; "no one could have done it better; but you would not have been able to have done it half as well, unless you had made up your mind

to keep your promise to the vagabond. With that off your mind, you ran alongside of him like a schooner with the black jack flying, and he was glad enough to sheer off; but if you had known that you intended to break your word, you would have crept up like a dirty lugger that takes half an hour to reef her sails. Always keep a promise, for a man can stand anything with his heart free."

"Ay, I always intended to keep it," answered Alfred Latimer; "but it had slipped my memory."

"Never let that slip," replied Jack Williams; "always look sharp after word given. The devil might have been a sailor if he had but looked aloft—but it was all very well done together."

By this time they were at the door of the cottage, and there Alfred Latimer paused for an instant in thought, which did not seem the most pleasant, notwithstanding all the commendations he had received; for when he had said that he always intended to keep his promise to Captain Tankerville he had spoken an untruth. The fifty pounds was too great a diminution of his small store to be parted with willingly; and he did not feel at all obliged to his companion for having handed over the money to his adversary so readily. Men, however, are in general—I might, indeed, say always—willing to assume the qualities imputed

to them. It is one of the minor forms of that want of mental courage by which we are continually led to actions that we never contemplated ; and, unwilling to show Williams that he was at heart different from that which the other thought fit to suppose him, Alfred Latimer mused over what was to be done to supply the deficiency in his purse, but made no comment aloud.

When he entered the little parlour he found Lucy seated at the table ready to set out ; and taking her by the hand he led her to the chaise, spoke a few words to Williams in regard to their future proceedings, and then directed the post-boy where to drive.

CHAPTER X.

A WEEK passed over at Mallington in events which may require some mention, but no very long detail. Gossip and scandal, tittle-tattle and surmise, had ample room to disport themselves in the affair of Lucy Edmonds and Alfred Latimer; nor were the marvel-mongers less satisfied with the pleasant little occurrences of Mr. Morton having been knocked down so shortly after the knocking down of Mr. Gibbs. It was all very delightful!

Nothing could be kinder than Mrs. Charlton was during the whole period of Mr. Morton's convalescence; nothing could be more tender or considerate for all his feelings. The house was kept as quiet as possible; no parties took place; she assigned him as his own particular abode the small back drawing-room, which looked down the hill; she was with him for several hours every day; and when she was not, she invariably

sent Louisa "to amuse him and keep him from being dull." She was, in fact, wonderfully considerate, both as a step-mother and as a friend.

It must be confessed that Morton and Louisa availed themselves of her kindness to the utmost, and they were very very happy together, though Mrs. Charlton's conduct somewhat puzzled them both.

It is a pleasure and a relief to the mind to quit the society of scamps, swindlers, and blackguards, and to come back to the amiable and the good; nor are we slightly tempted to remain with Louisa and her lover, to dwell upon their conversations, to relate their words and thoughts, and to speak of all that passed between them, even at the risk of being accused of insipidity, but that other events greatly affecting them in the end, call for notice at our hands. Before proceeding to touch upon those events, however, it may be needful to tell how Mrs. Charlton bore the absence of her respectable son, and the strong suspicions which she, as well as everybody else was forced to entertain regarding his abduction of Lucy Edmonds. She was a woman of great fortitude, and on no occasion of her life did she display that virtue more conspicuously than at present. When the news was brought to her that Alfred had left the cottage, and that there

was every reason to believe he had taken Lucy Edmonds with him, her cheek did flush a little, her eye did flash; and it is not improbable that if her son had been at hand she would have given him a box on the ear; but she very soon recovered her serenity, and took rather a dolorous and lamentable tone with good Dr. Western (who broke the intelligence to her as tenderly as possible), grieved over the depravity of the world, moralised upon the sorrows which children bring upon parents, and shed a tear or two over the incorrigible vice of her own offspring. Nevertheless, with the truest philosophy, she soon became reconciled to that which she could not change, said a few discouraging words in regard to the pursuit of her fugitive son and heir, and before night seemed to have forgotten the burden of her sorrows, so cheerfully did she bear them.

During the three days which Morton spent in the house by Mr. Nethersole's orders, two events occurred affecting himself which must be noticed, as neither the one nor the other were altogether without their effect, insignificant as one of them might seem.

A large packet arrived at the inn from London bearing his address; and being sent to the house, it remained for some time upon the drawing-room table, under the eyes of Mrs. Charlton. She

gazed at it with much curiosity ; she would have given a great deal to have seen the [contents. Who knows how far the irritating passion would have carried her, if it had not been for all the obstacles that lay in the way. But the packet was guarded with double and triple folds of thick brown paper and sealed string, equal in the eye of law and decency to triple gates of steel. Brown paper, string, and seals, are dangerous things to meddle with. Unlike the worthy independent electors of towns and boroughs in our purest of all pure representative systems, they almost uniformly bear witness of the fact whenever they are tampered with ; and Mrs. Charlton judiciously refrained.

Virtue had its reward, for no sooner did Mr. Morton enter the room, than he took out a pen-knife, begged Mrs. Charlton's pardon for investigating the contents of the packet, and cut the string in a most wasteful and extravagant manner, displaying to her eyes what seemed nearly a ream of large-sized drawing-paper, a vast number of Brookman and Langdon's black lead pencils, and sundry small cakes of water colours. It seemed, in short, as if he had made up his mind to teach all Mallington to draw ; but, strange to say, nothing could be more satisfactory to Mrs. Charlton than the sight. She

had been staggered in her opinion of Mr. Morton of late; but this exhibition confirmed her belief that Mr. Morton was exactly the sort of gentleman she wanted.

The other incident to which we have alluded was the arrival of a visitor to Mr. Morton from the great city of London. Exactly two days after his misadventure on the common, and about half an hour after the arrival of the coach at Mallington, some one rang at the bell of Mallington House.

The butler announced him to Mr. Morton in the little drawing-room, and the latter naturally inquired what sort of a person it was, to which the man replied, "A queer-looking sort of gentleman, sir, with knee breeches and white stockings."

"Pray, let him come up," said Morton; "or, perhaps, not to disturb you, Mrs. Charlton, it will be better to send him to my dressing-room."

But the lady would not hear of such a thing, saying that she and Louisa would go into the other drawing-room, that Mr. Morton might speak with the visitor.

That visitor, however, had to pass through the chamber to which she betook herself before he reached the one in which Mr. Morton remained; and consequently the lady of the mansion had a

full opportunity of seeing his somewhat remarkable person. He was a man of five feet ten or eleven in height; and yet, strange to say, he looked short, for his breadth was out of proportion to his length. What was the girth of his shoulders we cannot take upon ourselves to say, but his chest seemed to have been modelled by nature from the form of a bull. His thighs, legs, and arms were all muscular, and the calves of his legs looked perfectly colossal in the white cotton stockings. As if he fancied that the eye of the beholder could not take him all in at once, he had divided the superficies of his person into separate compartments, as the geographers mark out the different countries on a map by distinct colours. His back, shoulders, and arms were clothed in dark blue, his chest and stomach were bright yellow, his abdomen and thighs, including the knees, were drab, and the legs down to the shoes, as we have before said, were white. His head too was a remarkable head; the forehead by no means an unintellectual one, with the observing faculties very strongly developed. Altogether it was not very large, but it had a square stern character about it, and the face, though the features were not bad, had a look of shrewd daring cunning as its habitual expression.

The instant he entered—though the servant

said, "this way, sir," and walked on towards the opposite door—Mr. Morton's visitor stopped, bowed to the two ladies, and then, in a moment, his eyes wandered over everything that the chamber contained. The glance was as rapid as light, but yet you could not help feeling that it marked everything with an accuracy very peculiar. One saw that it was not a general sweep, but that it went round by pulses, as it were, stopping at everything for the millionth part of a second, and then on again, from table to chair, from chair to china vase, from china vase to fire-screen, from fire-screen to picture, from picture to piano, from piano to music-stand, from music-stand to windows, from windows to curtains, from curtains to doors, and so on to the very handles and key-holes of the locks. It was a glance quite equal to Lord Burleigh's shake of the head, and as soon over, for on he walked immediately, and followed the servant to Mr. Morton's presence.

"What a strange-looking creature," said Mrs. Charlton, to her step-daughter, as soon as the man had passed through the room.

Louisa only smiled in reply.

On the visitor's entrance Mr. Morton gazed on him as a stranger, and he, on his part, began the conversation by inquiring, in very good language,

whether he had the honour of addressing Mr. Morton. The young gentleman replied in the affirmative; and the other immediately went on to say, "Well, sir, my name is Prior; and I was sent down by Sir Richard to speak with you concerning your pocket-book, according to your desire."

"Oh! from Bow-street?" exclaimed Morton; "I did not expect you so soon. Pray take a seat, and I will explain the whole matter to you."

Prior, the officer, according to this invitation, seated himself on one of the drawing-room chairs, and he then received from Mr. Morton a clear and distinct account of the attack made upon him on the common, and the loss of his pocket-book. He uttered not a word while the particulars were related; but, like a skilful physician, suffered the patient to state his own case before he commenced his interrogatory. In the present instance, indeed, the mind of the narrator was of that peculiar cast which brings easily and, as it were, naturally into one focus all the principal points of any question it has to deal with, and, therefore, at the end of the tale the officer had very few inquiries to make.

"He was a taller man, I think you say, sir," was his first question, "than the man who brought you home?"

"Decidedly," replied Morton; "if the person

who struck me with the stone was the same whom I saw by the edge of the pit."

"Can you give a guess how long you might lie there?" asked Prior.

"It could not have been many minutes," answered the young gentleman, "for as I reached the top of the hill in going I heard Mallington clock strike nine; the distance from that spot to the cottage is about a mile, and when I came into the hall of this house with Williams, the hall clock was marking a quarter to ten."

"He must have been very near, then, sir," rejoined Prior, "when the blow was given."

"That is true, certainly," replied Morton; "but yet that does not prove that he had anything to do with it."

"No, sir; but it is a suspicious circumstance in the case of a man of bad character," was Prior's reply; and, after a moment's thought, he went on to say, "Well! there is no telling as yet, but I will go and make inquiries. I know one young fellow down here of the name of Maltby; and though he is not likely to tell anything, yet one sometimes gets a hint by finding out what it is that folks wish to conceal. However, I must have you tell me, in the first place, sir, what it is you want—the man or the pocket-book. I think I shall have no difficulty in

nabbing the one or getting back the other ; but I doubt that I shall be able to manage both."

" Oh ! the pocket-book, by all means, if it can be obtained with all its contents," answered Morton. " Indeed ! I have already ordered bills to be struck offering a reward for the recovery, and promising to ask no questions ; but the lazy fellow of a printer has not done them yet."

" So much the better, sir," replied Prior ; " don't you think of sticking them up. Leave the matter to me. If you will give a reward and ask no questions, we'll soon get the pocket-book back, never fear."

" The reward I proposed to offer was fifty pounds," rejoined Morton ; " and I shall be well inclined to bestow on you, Mr. Prior, the like sum, if you recover the papers for me."

" Thank you, sir ; quite sufficient," replied the officer ; " you may look upon the matter as done, if they have not tindered the stuff—I mean burned the papers. First, we must find out who has got the book, and then we must tame him a little. It may be Williams himself—it may be some other ; and now I think of it, as I got off the coach I saw Captain Tankerville walking along with a slickery doll from London."

" With a what ?" exclaimed Morton, in much surprise.

“ Oh ! what I call a slickery doll, sir,” replied Prior, laughing ; “ that means an over-dressed bad woman ; and I should not wonder if there was a whole gang of ’em down doing business in different ways—cracksmen, and smashers, and prigs, and all. However, the pocket-book’s the first thing. I ’ll just go and ’stablish myself at the Bagpipes, to see what’s going forward, and I ’ll bring you up a report.”

“ Do, do, Mr. Prior,” answered Morton ; “ I should like to hear the steps you take as you go on.”

“ In the name of fortune, Mr. Morton,” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, “ who is that odd-looking man ?”

“ Only a Bow-street officer, my dear madam,” replied Morton ; “ you know I lost my purse and my pocket-book when I was knocked down on the common ; and I thought it expedient to send to London to see what could be done for their recovery.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE movements of Mr. Morton were very mysterious to the good people of Mallington. They did not watch him. Oh, no!—they would not have demeaned themselves to any such pitiful practices in regard to any person, much less towards a poor pitiful painter, though he was taken notice of by the gentlefolks, and held his head high. But Miss Mathilda Martin could not help observing that though painters might, perhaps, sketch by day, yet she could not see how they could sketch by night; and yet Mr. Morton was more than once seen walking up to Mallington Park after sunset. Sometimes, too, he did it very sily, as Miss Mathilda observed; for twice, instead of walking straightforward down through the town, like a man, he went by the back lanes.

Mr. Crump, who was one day in the shop while her observations were going on, ventured

to hint that, perhaps, Mr. Morton might have wished to call upon Dr. Western in his way, as the doctor was so fond of him. But Miss Mathilda immediately proceeded in the most approved fashion to neutralise Mr. Crump's defence of the young gentleman, by imputing personal motives.

"Ah! you say that, Mr. Crump," she replied, "because he's always buying things at your shop."

"He always pays for them ready money," said Mr. Crump.

"Well, we may some day see the end of that," exclaimed Miss Martin, coming to her sister's rescue. "There was that Mrs. Latimer, when first she came she must pay ready money for everything, too; and yet I know that when that old fool Charlton took up with her, and made her his wife, she had not a five-pound note to bless herself with; and now that she is his widow, and got a large jointure, she is in debt to every person in the place, and in London, too."

"I don't see why she should be so taken with Mr. Morton," said Mr. Crump, "if he isn't a man of fortune; for she's very fond of great people."

"Nonsense!" replied Miss Mathilda. "Birds of a feather flock together, Mr. Crump; and, if

all tales be true, her own father was just such another as this Mr. Morton—an impudent artist, or music-master, or something of that kind, giving himself all the airs of a gentleman born, till he hooked in the Honourable Mr. Latimer to marry his daughter; and now this fellow is just playing the same game to marry poor Miss Louisa. I should like to spoil the job for them very much; for I can't a bear to see a nice pretty genteel young woman, of six or seven thousand a year, throw herself away on such a fellow as that."

"Well, it is no business of mine," said Miss Martin, senior; "but I can't help wondering what makes him go down so often to the park."

"I should not wonder if he went poaching the game," said Miss Mathilda. "Edmonds complains very much that there's continually some depredation committed; and perhaps that's where all his ready money comes from."

"Pooh, nonsense!" said Mr. Crump, who did not seem to have learned in Mallington that malignity scorns all the bounds of probability, and is not checked by gross absurdity itself.

"Pooh, nonsense!" cried Miss Mathilda. "If it isn't poaching, it's something a great deal worse, I dare say. I know he has sent three or four large packages up to London by the stage-coach, and no one knows what was in them. I

think the magistrate should be informed that he's always hanging about the park."

"You had better tell Dr. Western," said Mr. Crump. "There he goes down the hill."

"Dr. Western's no better than an old woman," said Miss Mathilda. "No, if I tell anybody—and I have a great mind to—it shall be Mr. Middleton. He's something like a magistrate."

"I think we get nothing but odd people," said Miss Martin, who had got a little tired of the subject of Mr. Morton, and was less staunch upon the scent of scandal than her sister, though the older dog of the two—"there's that man, now, down at the Bagpipes. I mean that great heavy odd-looking man, with the low-crowned hat."

"Men say he's a Bow-street officer," replied Mr. Crump; "but I dare say they know little about it."

"If he is, I'll warrant he's come down to look after this fellow Morton," observed Miss Mathilda.

"I've seen him twice walk up as if he were going towards Mallington House," added Miss Martin; "perhaps it was to watch what this Morton was about there."

"Ah! he'll be caught some of these days," rejoined her sister, "if he does not make haste to

marry Miss Charlton, for gold is a salve for all sores, they say."

The conversation which I have detailed was only a specimen of that which was held in various circles in Mallington. There were in the place, indeed, two factions—a Morton and an Anti-Morton faction, but it is sad to say, notwithstanding all Mr. Morton's many good qualities, the Anti-Morton faction was by far the most numerous. This may and ought to be accounted for; but the facts were these:—All those whom he dealt largely with were his partisans; but as Mr. Morton was a single man, keeping up no great establishment, the number with whom he dealt largely was not great. The body of the rest of the townsfolks hated him for two very sufficient reasons—first, because he did not deal with them; and, secondly, because they knew nothing about him, and would have liked to know something about him. He acted as a continual blister upon their curiosity; and all reasonable men hate a blister, wherever it is applied. Thus, Mr. Nethersole spoke with profound respect of Mr. Morton, thought him a very distinguished man, evidently of very high breeding. This was because he had bandaged his head, bled him, and sent him sixteen draughts and three boxes of pills. The lawyer, on the

contrary, ventured to sneer at Mr. Morton, talked about men of straw, shrugged his shoulders, and said people would see what would come of it, which, for a very discreet and silent man, was going somewhat far. But the reason was that Mr. Morton had never during his residence in Mallington employed half a skin of parchment or three inches of red tape.

Happily, however, the means were always in Morton's reach for wiping away such enmities whenever he liked it. Thus one day, in the course of the week of which we have been talking, he extinguished at one blow the animosity of the worthy "Solicitor, &c." It so happened that as he was walking up the street, after a call at Dr. Western's, he turned sharp in at the office door, and asked one of the clerks if Mr. Skinner was at home. The clerk replied in the affirmative, and instantly, descending from the perilous height on which he was perched, he opened a painted door which led into a room behind—the green door was hooked back—and announced to Mr. Skinner, who was writing letters within, that "the gentleman" wanted to see him. Now it would seem from the clerk's expression, and from Mr. Skinner's immediately comprehending what it was he meant, that there was only one gentleman in all Mallington

—at least, in their opinion. However, out came Mr. Skinner immediately, with spectacles on his long and somewhat fox-like nose; and with a profound bow he ushered his visitor into the interior of his temple. The young gentleman remained with the elderly lawyer for nearly an hour, and at the end of that time Mr. Skinner showed him out with the most profound deference and humility. Not a word passed in regard to the subject of their intercourse—not a single syllable, though Mr. Skinner sat up that night till half-past twelve, writing letters and papers with his own hand, and ever after declared that Mr. Morton was indeed a very gentlemanly man, and evidently a person of distinction. His conversion, however, had no effect upon the rest of the citizens. Though his opinion was of value—though he was not a man to be cheated, taken in, deceived, or imposed upon, yet the great bulk of the good people of Mallington remained obdurate in their infidelity, and headed by the Misses Martin, seemed only the more acerb and virulent from the loss of the co-operation of Mr. Skinner.

That very night there was a little party of four assembled to take tea at Miss Martin's; and how did they enjoy themselves! If Mr. Morton had been a haunch of venison, he could not

have supplied them with more delicate food. They cut him up, and carved at him, and hewed him into all manner of shapes. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon—between whom and the Misses Martin once raged the most deadly enmity—had now found favour with the two spinsters, and having amassed a little money, acquired a considerable fund of gossip, and increased in spleen as they grew old, were quite of the Martin coterie. They were their two co-operators on the present occasion, especially Mrs. Dixon, who was a tall, large-boned, gaunt woman, with the frame of a life-guardsmen, and the face of a hyena. Her character was a very determined one; she had no fears, no scruples; she herself declared that she always spoke out what she thought; and, to do her but justice, she did that and more, whenever the reputation of another human creature was concerned. She boldly pronounced Mr. Morton to be no more than a swindler; and when the junior Miss Martin communicated to her all her own suspicions regarding that gentleman; and the excellent grounds upon which they were founded, Mrs. Dixon replied, “Well, Mathilda, if I were you, and possessed all the information you possess, I would lose no time in communicating it to a magistrate. It’s a positive duty, my dear.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Dixon, who was a small, thin, pale-faced man, with a reddish nose rather turned up, which looked as if it had always caught cold. “No, no, don’t you meddle. If people is such fools to be cheated, let ’em be cheated. Why should you stop ’em? Put the case so, Miss Mathilda: let us suppose that Mr. Morton is a swindler, or anything you like—I say nothing, though I confess it looks very like it—well, but supposing that it is so, and you goes away to Mr. Middleton, or any one else, and tells him what you thinks upon the case. Well, then Mr. Middleton asks you for your proofs; and then there’s a rumpus. You can prove nothing.”

“No, but”—replied Miss Martin, the elder, who was fond of vigorous measures done dexterously—“Mathilda might go up to Squire Middleton’s in a quiet slip-my-over kind of way, and tell him all about the beautiful ribands we have got from town, in case he should like to give some to his cousin, Miss Jones, as he did last year; and then she can slide in a word about Mrs. Charlton; and that will soon bring it round to Mr. Morton; and then she can tell him her mind, do you see, without making it a regular sort of eggs-o’fishy information.”

After much debate, thus was it settled that

Miss Mathilda Martin should do ; and thus she did do, not a little to the satisfaction of Mr. Middleton, who was well pleased to find that there were people in Mallington who liked that gentleman as little as he did himself.

CHAPTER XII.

IN the mean time, Mr. Prior had set about his work very quietly. After having seen Mr. Morton, and returned to the inn, he sat himself down in the commercial room, as it was called, and quietly considered his ground, and looked about him. He courted no conversation—he looked dull and reserved—he gave himself none of the airs of inquiry, or of Bow-street-officerism; but while he ate his mutton chop, and drank his pint of ale, seemingly not looking at anybody or anything in the room—he overheard everything that was said around him, and judged, with the utmost professional skill, the characters of those who sat at the different tables round the room.

There was a pale man with a blue beard, at one of these tables, dressed in a black coat and grey breeches, who sighed frequently over a plate of boiled beef and a glass of gin and water.

"A walker of the Tract Society," said Mr. Prior to himself, as he eyed him.

At another were seated two men—one in a blue coat and bright yellow buttons, with well-worn, but not well cleaned leather breeches, and top-boots sadly in want of oxalic acid. The other, with a green Newmarket coat, a fancy button, brown cloth trousers, and boots with spurs over them: a fresh-coloured blue-eyed youth, with large lips, and curly light hair.

"Sound! Lord bless 'ee, you've only to look at her," said leather breeches, with a screw in his eye. "Why, I trotted her up that blessed hill this morning as hard as I could go. She's none of mine, she's the genuine property of a gentleman who wants a little hard cash. So take her or leave her just as you like. I've no interest in the matter."

"A horse-couper and his cully," said Mr. Prior, internally. "He'll do him."

At a third table appeared Mr. Gibbs, with his long ringlets flowing, and dropping odours, though not wine. He looked about him, sadly at a loss for somebody on whom to bestow a description of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad. The horse couper was hopeless, for it was evident that his hair was never trimmed but with the same shears that cut his horses' manes and tails

—never oiled but with the sweat of his brow. To the dispenser of tracts, the Balm of Trinidad would have been an abomination. But the young country cully gave him some hope; for his fair curls were so crisp and dry as to excite Mr. Gibbs's compassion. He was only waiting for an opportunity of fairly introducing the subject to his notice, when Mr. Prior entered the room. Mr. Gibbs's eye instantly followed him, and rested upon the close-cut black hair, which seemed as if intended to have a wig over it, with a look of great despondency.

Nevertheless, the brief glance of Mr. Prior was sufficient to make that gentleman expect something more from Mr. Gibbs; and when the girl of the house entered, and Mr. Gibbs called her "Betsy," and moreover bade her tell "Mrs. Pluckrose" so-and-so, Mr. Prior was confirmed in his previous opinion. "For," said he to himself, "he has been here some time, that's clear, and knows the place and the people." At length Mr. Gibbs, joining in the conversation between the cully and the horse-couper, ventured to recommend to the former the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, much to the indignation of the latter, who did not like his dealings to be interrupted.

"He's a perfumer," said Mr. Prior mentally; and a minute or two after Mr. Gibbs sat down,

rebuffed by the brutality of the horse-couper and the indifference of his chapman. After having finished his mutton chop, and drank his ale, the Bow-street officer called for a glass of brandy and water, and then, as if the icy shackles of reserve had been thawed, he put on a brisker look, gazed about him, and entered into conversation with his companions of the commercial room, first speaking a word to the tract distributor, then saying something to the dealer in horse-flesh in a jeering tone, which called forth a pretty sharp reply.

“Ah! yes,” answered Prior; “I’ve seen you before, I think. Ar’n’t you the man that was pulled up one day for selling two glandered horses in Smithfield?” and he looked him full in the face, as if he had known all about it, though, to say truth, he spoke but from a random suspicion that such an event might very well have formed part of his good friend’s history. The horse-dealer repelled the insinuation with indignation; to which Mr. Prior merely replied, “Well, don’t put yourself in a passion, I only asked you a question, my good friend;” and then, turning to Mr. Gibbs, he added, “Such a thing isn’t unlikely to any man in his way of life, is it, sir?”

Mr. Gibbs did not venture an opinion upon

the subject, but a conversation immediately began between him and the officer, while the two personages at the other table arose and quitted the room.

"I thought it best to give that young fellow a hint," said Prior, in a confidential tone, "for I'm quite sure that jockey will do him. I'll bet you a glass of brandy and water that the horse he's going to sell him is spavined, or broken-kneed, or has some screw loose or another, and yet he'll go and buy him."

"There's nothing so good on earth for broken knees," said Mr. Gibbs, "as the fragrant Balm of Trinidad."

"I dare say," replied Prior; "but suppose, sir, we take a glass together. What shall it be? Hot with sugar, or cold without?"

Mr. Gibbs would take anything that his companion thought proper; and they were soon in full talk, during the flow of which the officer ascertained that Mr. Gibbs had been now for several weeks in that identical little town of Mallington, and that he was not exactly a perfumer, but the traveller for a London house, and he asked himself, what could have induced such a person to pitch his tent for such a length of time in a spot that offered so few inducements to one of his calling. He found, likewise, that Mr. Gibbs

knew something of almost everybody in Mallington; and, therefore, that his own sagacity had not deceived him. There were certain subjects, however, upon which the worthy patron of the Balm of Trinidad was rather shy; for having his own views, and not knowing the character of his collocutor, he could not divine that there, upon the chair opposite to him, sat the man of all others who was most likely to help him. Thus, when Mr. Prior propounded to him the following sage observation, "There's been a good deal of ugly work going on here lately, I hear," he merely replied, "So it seems."

"A gentleman has been knocked down upon the common and robbed a night or two ago," continued Prior.

"Yes, so I find," replied Mr. Gibbs.

The blue-bearded vendor of tracts, overhearing this awful notification, looked at the large clock over the mantelpiece, and having to walk five or six miles that night, speedily quitted the premises. Prior, however, sat immoveably fixed opposite Mr. Gibbs, calculating what made his companion so reserved upon the particular subject before them. He resolved to pursue his point, nevertheless, and added, "I should like to know somewhat more of that affair."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Gibbs. "Why so? How does it concern you?"

"Oh! it concerns me a little," said Prior; "I may tell you how by-and-by. Pray do you know anything of a man named Williams here?"

"Oh! yes," replied Gibbs, in an indifferent tone; "I know something of him, but not much."

"What sort of character does he bear?" demanded the officer.

"Why, the people about give him a very indifferent character," answered the traveller; "but I say nothing, for I don't like to speak what I can't prove."

"Quite right, Mr. Thompson—quite right," replied Prior; "that's the best way in every court. Nevertheless, I should like to hear something more of this Jack Williams. He helped the gentleman home, it seems, that was knocked down."

"He didn't help me home, though I was knocked down, too," said Mr. Gibbs, in an incautious moment.

"Ah!—so you were knocked down too, were you?" was the officer's rejoinder. "Well, I should like to hear about that too," and he proceeded to cross-question Mr. Gibbs in a way that gentleman found it impossible to escape

from. By this means he wormed out of Mr. Gibbs the whole story of his adventure in Wenlock Wood, and all that had followed; and, as one confession begat another, Mr. Gibbs ended by avowing that he was determined not to quit Mallington till he had discovered the robber.

"Whom you still suspect to be Jack Williams?" said Prior.

"No, no," replied Mr. Gibbs, "I didn't say that; I suspect nobody."

"However, I'm different," said Prior, "for I suspect everybody. That's a part of my trade;" and leaning his two arms upon the table, he bent his head over them, saying, in a low tone, "I am an officer from Bow-street, Mr. Gibbs, and have come down to look after this affair; but that's between you and me. However, we can chat the matter over, and I'll tell you one thing to begin with. Williams was the man who knocked you down, you may be sure of that; and if he did not do this other business, he had a finger in the pie."

Mr. Gibbs no longer affected to deny the suspicions that he really entertained, but, delighted with the prospect of the aid and assistance he was likely to receive, poured forth the long dammed-up stream of his communicativeness, told all that he had done and suffered, and gave

Mr. Prior a full insight, as far as he could give it, into everything that had taken place in Mallington during the last month.

Prior bestowed great commendations upon Mr. Gibbs's skill and perseverance, exclaiming, "Why, with a little teaching and practice you would do for the office, Mr. Gibbs; but now I must find out this fellow Jack Williams, and have a talk with him."

"Oh! that will be easy enough," replied the traveller; "he's a great friend of mine is Jack Williams. I invited him here to drink a bowl of punch with me, and tried to get him to change a ten-pound note, because amongst the guineas I had about me when I was robbed, there was one of Queen Anne, with the least little bit filed out of the edge, so that I could have sworn to it; but he wouldn't change the note; and I don't know how it was, but either the punch must have been very strong, or something; for by the time we got to the end of the first bowl I felt as drowsy as if I had drank a whole bottle of the American Soothing Syrup, and in a minute or two after I was sound asleep."

"Ay, he hocused your liquor," replied the officer; "he must have been up to something that day, and didn't want to be watched."

Mr. Gibbs mused for a minute or two, and

then said, "I dare say you're right, for that was the very day when that wild young blade, Mr. Latimer, carried off the park-keeper's pretty daughter, and Williams had a hand in that affair I know;" and then came the whole story of Lucy and her abduction by Mrs. Charlton's son.

Prior listened attentively, picking out from the long-winded statement of Mr. Gibbs whatever suited his own purpose, as throwing light upon the character of Jack Williams, just as an industrious sempstress, from a great bundle of thread, chooses out those skeins and colours that are necessary for the work she has in hand. When the whole story was brought to a conclusion, however, he returned to the charge about seeing the person in question. Mr. Gibbs professed his readiness to lead him that moment to the house where Williams lodged; and out they both sallied into the streets of Mallington. Near the door they suddenly encountered Captain Tankerville, with an extravagantly smart but somewhat brazen looking lady on his arm, and the meeting did not seem particularly satisfactory to that respectable gentleman. For a single moment he appeared to hesitate whether he should recognise Prior or not; but the devil of habitual impudence had possession of him, and he gave the officer a cool condescending nod, such as the fashionable gen-

tleman might bestow upon a person in Prior's situation.

Prior understood the matter perfectly, perceived all the minute springs and wheels that were moving in Captain Tankerville's mind, but did not choose that they should produce the result intended, and, therefore, pausing with a familiar shake of the head, he said, "Ah, captain, you down here! What's the go now? I should think that this was no lay for you. There can't be much business doing in your way here."

"I wanted a little country air, Prior," replied Captain Tankerville, moving on.

"Why, I heard you had been taking country air over in Surrey," answered the officer with a laugh; and he too pursued his way with Mr. Gibbs, asking his companion "whether that chap had been long down in those parts?"

"Oh dear! no," answered Mr. Gibbs; "the first time I ever saw him was yesterday."

"I was thinking," said Prior, "whether he could have anything to do with these jobs. He's just a likely fellow to put other men up to a bad piece of business, and then turn stag. It won't be long before he weighs his weight now; and so if he's had any hand in this, we could soon get at it from him."

"I don't think it," answered Gibbs. "He's

never been here before since I've been in the place, and this has been going on a long while."

"Well, we shall see," answered Prior; "but I'll talk to Williams first. You show me where he lives, and I'll go in and have a chat with him."

The two worthy gentlemen, however, were disappointed in their expectations. They soon reached the house where he was said to lodge; a small red brick dwelling, with some cakes, parliament, gingerbread, and apples in the window; while over the door was inscribed, "Pickett, dealer in tea, sugar, coffee, snuff, and tobacco." But on inquiring in the shop, while Gibbs walked slowly up the lane again, the officer was informed by a woman that her lodger had not been home for two days, and that she did not know when he would return.

"Are you sure he'll return at all?" asked the officer in a cynical tone.

"Oh dear! yes," replied the woman; "he is sure to come back, for he's left all his things."

Prior paused for a moment with an unusual degree of hesitation. His habitual propensities impelled him strongly to walk up stairs, and to examine what things Mr. Williams had left behind him; but recollecting that, in order to obtain what Mr. Morton wanted, he must "do

his spiriting gently," he forbore, and merely requested [the worthy lady to inform Mr. Williams that a gentleman had been to see him; that he was lodging at the Bagpipes, and would be glad of a call as soon as her lodger came back.

He then retrod his steps, hurrying his pace a little to overtake Gibbs, and soon perceived him walking slowly along in conversation with another person. With his keen quick eye Prior scanned the figure of the good traveller's companion, and then walking up to the personage who was still busily talking with Gibbs, he laid his broad hand heavily upon his shoulder. Bill Maltby, for he it was, turned round with a start, and, the moment he saw Prior, turned as pale as death.

CHAPTER XIII.

“AH, Master Maltby, you down here!” said Prior, fixing his keen eye upon the other’s countenance, and marking the waning colour in his cheek with a slight smile. “Still upon the small go, I suppose—nothing heavy yet, or I should have heard of you, Master Maltby.”

Although the speech of the excellent Mr. Prior was not altogether pleasant to the ears of Bill Maltby, especially being delivered in the presence of Mr. Gibbs, yet it was so far satisfactory that it showed him that the especial errand of the worthy officer in Mallington did not refer to himself. He therefore replied, with a re-assured countenance, and in a civil tone,—“Oh! no, Mr. Prior; I am down here in my native place, living a very quiet life now.”

“I dare say,” answered the officer, in that peculiar tone which implied that he dared to say nothing of the kind. “Well, we shall see, Bill;

but there's one little thing I should like to speak to you about—as a friend you know, quite as a friend, for I am only taking the country air, travelling incog. for my amusement, like other great men—no business in life, Bill—so if you could just make it convenient to give me a call at the Bagpipes some time this evening, I should like to have a little talk with you about one or two things.”

“Oh! I'll come, certainly, sir,” replied Bill Maltby, who was quite sure that if Prior wanted him for any unpleasant purpose, he would have had the handcuffs on him by that time.

“Come in about an hour,” said Prior; “then we can have a glass of wine together. In the mean time I want to talk a little with this gentleman.” Maltby taking the hint, walked away reiterating his promise to come at the appointed time.

No sooner was he gone than Mr. Gibbs proceeded to inquire into the personal character of Mr. Maltby; and when he heard the circumstances of the officer's acquaintance with him he in return related the fact of his having been wheedled over to Sturton.

“Ah!” said Prior, in a meditative tone; “then he is a confederate of Jack Williams, is he? I thought it must be so; but we'll try if we

can't make the decoy duck quack as far as is needful. A pretty gang of them there seems to be hereabouts just now; but our London gents do love, every now and then, to see a bit of country life. He must be a shrewd hand, this Jack Williams, not to take your flimsies, Mr. Gibbs. You won't be able to do anything with him; for, take my word for it, he's got as sharp an eye for a Queen Anne guinea as you have."

"He'll not stop there, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs. "When once a man begins he's sure to go on."

"Ah! there you're right," replied Mr. Prior. "That shows you know something of life, Mr. Gibbs; and as soon as he weighs his weight we shall have him."

In conversation of this kind they pursued their way back to the Bagpipes; and the officer retired to his own chamber, and ordered a bottle of wine. Shortly afterwards, Bill Maltby appeared at the inn door; but had very nearly been sent away again, as Prior had not thought fit to communicate his name, and it was only by description that the barmaid was at length brought to understand who was the person asked for. When at length Mr. Maltby was ushered up to the officer's room, which was tolerably high in the building, he was received by Prior with a sort of condescending courtesy, and requested to seat himself. He

looked a little anxiously for the commencement of the discourse; but Prior filled the two glasses, nodded, and gave "The King." When this toast was drunk the officer filled again, and then, scratching a certain spot a little behind the temple, which was accustomed to be scratched upon important occasions, he entered upon business.

"Well, Mr. Maltby," he said, "so you are down here taking your native air. That's quite right. Here's your health. You are a young man who knows how to take care of yourself, and I dare say may go on a long way, if you don't go fast. But what I wanted to say is this, you are acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Williams, I think?"

Maltby nodded his head.

"And do a little business with him in a quiet way, I dare say," continued the officer.

"Oh dear! no," answered Maltby; "I've given up that sort of thing; and besides, Mr. Williams is quite a different sort of person. He's only here for a while till he gets another ship, and spends his prize-money."

"Come, come, now," answered Prior, in a tone of jocular reproach; "as if I didn't know, Bill. What's the use coming that lay with me? Besides, I am not looking after the young man to

do him any harm ; I've got no warrant against him, bless you ; I've a little bit of business to do with him which may turn to his good. So, if you know where he is to be found, speak out like a man."

"No, I don't," replied Maltby ; "I haven't set eyes on him these three days. But what is it about, Mr. Prior ? Perhaps I can help you, notwithstanding."

"Ah ! that's another affair," answered Prior, meditating ; and Bill Maltby ventured to add, "If it's about the job of that fellow Gibbs, you are mistaken, I can tell you. Jack Williams wasn't in Mallington at the time."

"You were," answered Prior, turning his eyes suddenly upon him.

"That's neither here nor there," answered Maltby, with a perceptible change of countenance. "He wasn't, that's sure."

"He might not be very far off, though," answered the officer, with a grim smile : "but, however, it's not about that at all. I know what I know, and if it were needful could take you all over the ground, and show you how he came, and how he went, and where he stood, just as if I had seen it all. But, as I said, that's no affair of mine. I've no warrant. What I'm after now is this business of Mr. Morton's ; and

look you, Bill, I'm determined—and you know I'm the man to do it—either to have the papers or to have the men. The money they may keep, and perhaps may have a trifle more, of twenty pounds or so, if they give up the pocket-book quietly and quick."

"I didn't know any pocket-book had been taken," answered Maltby; "and if it has, most likely they've burnt it. They're not likely to keep a sticky thing like that."

"Then I'll have the men," said Prior, in a determined tone.

"Well, I can't help you there," replied Maltby, drinking down his wine with a gulp; "but one thing I'm very sure of, Williams was not the man to knock the gentleman down. Of that I give you my honour."

Small rogues are men of honour, as well as great ones—in their own particular way.

"I'll have him, and the other fellow too," answered Prior, "and then you know this business of Gibbs's must be gone into; so you can judge whether that will be pleasant. It will be much better for them to give up the papers and the pocket-book quietly, and then they can go on till another time; but if they don't, they're done; and some others may find themselves in a mess, who, if they don't cut capers, would find

themselves lagged to Botany for life ; and that 's not pleasant."

"No," said Bill Maltby, in what we romance-writers call a tone of deep feeling.

"Does the gentleman suspect Jack Williams ?" he inquired at length.

"Lord bless you ! no," replied Prior, laughing, "he thinks him a very honest fellow, as I dare say he is in his way. I don't mean to say he knocked him down ; but there's weight enough upon him, I can tell you, to pull the rope tight, if things were looked into ; and it's much better a young man should be quiet, and give up a trifle like this pocket-book, than to hang about shilly-shally for the chance of a better reward. Twenty pounds is very handsome, I think, and I dare say the gentleman wouldn't stand for five pounds more or less."

"Well, I tell you, Mr. Prior, upon my soul ! that Williams had nothing to do with it," answered Maltby ; "but I think I know where I can find out whether the papers are burnt or not, and, if not, I dare say they'll be given up."

"If they are given up, all may be kept as still as an empty trunk," replied Prior ; "if not I must have the men, and then there will be some precious work. You must be quick, however,

Bill, for you see I can't dawdle away my time and let matters slip; we must go to work at once either one way or the other."

Bill Maltby fell into a new fit of thought, but at length he brought forth, as if by a jerk, the following question, "Would you mind taking a long walk with me to-night, Mr. Prior?"

"Not particular," replied Prior, "I want a little exercise."

"Well, I think," said Maltby, "I could get you to speak with a young man who knows something of this job; but mind it's only upon condition that you do nothing against him."

"Not to-night, not to-night, of course!" replied the officer. "Honour, Bill!—honour! Before I begin active operations of course I shall declare war; but it's to be the same on both sides, remember. We must have no traps, Bill."

"Oh dear, no, Mr. Prior!" replied Bill Maltby. "That would be devilish little good."

"Well, I'm your man," said Prior; "only I must just go and tell that Mr. Gibbs that I can't drink tea with him to-night. We had better set out at once, I think, for it's beginning to grow duskish."

"Let it get a little darker first," replied Maltby, "for I don't well know how these fellows may like it."

“That’s just as you please,” replied Prior; “and we’ve got the bottle to finish, too; so you take another glass, while I go and tell Gibbs.”

Thus saying, the officer left the room; and Bill Maltby helped himself to another glass of wine; but that was the only movement that he made. He did not even venture to look round him, but remained seated where he had first taken up his position, as if he were afraid that Prior might see on his return if his chair were moved in the least degree out of the same situation. Throughout the whole of their conversation, as the reader has, doubtless, observed, the swaggering, bullying dare-devil has been changed into the meek, compliant, very humble servant of the officer; and such, indeed, was the influence of those myrmidons of old Bow-street, that it seldom if ever happened, in dealing with habitual ruffians, that they met with anything like resistance. Maltby was fully under that influence, well knowing that there were many acts, even in the course of his short life, which brought him within the reach of the iron arm of justice. In the present instance, indeed, there was a predominant fear that awed him into the most submissive tranquillity in the presence of the officer. The part which he had taken in the robbery of Gibbs was perhaps sufficient, as the

law then stood, to put his neck within the unpleasant circle of a rope. He had prompted and planned the robbery—he had shared the spoil—he had been an accessory, both before and after the fact. Men who have committed evil acts are always inclined to suppose that others who suspect them have better information than they really have; and he attributed the hints which the officer had given regarding the real state of the case, rather to actual knowledge than mere suspicion. It is, indeed, conscience that makes cowards of us all; and he sat considering the fearful phantoms of his imagination; and thinking how he might drive them from him, till Prior returned.

In the meanwhile that worthy gentleman had visited Mr. Gibbs, and though he entertained no positive fear or hesitation in regard to accompanying Bill Maltby, whithersoever he might lead him, yet he thought it might be just as well to take some precautionary measures, and consequently asked his new-found friend to watch which way he and his companion went, without actually dogging their steps, and to sit up for him till he returned.

“If I’m not back by twelve,” he said, “it may be as well to seek for me. Not that I think anything is likely to happen; but still you know

men's blood will get up, and they may take a drop or two of spirits more than needful. So I shall leave you, Mr. Gibbs, to look out for me."

This being settled, the officer returned to the room where he had left his companion, eyed him well to ascertain what he had been about during his own absence, finished the bottle according to their previous determination, and then proceeding to the goods and chattels which lay in the window, he drew forth a tolerably large pair of pistols.

"It's always as well," he said, examining the powder in the pans, and pressing down the ramrod tight in each, "It's always as well, Mr. Maltby, to be provided with the barkers, though I am quite sure you would not behave ungentlemanly towards me. However, I never go far without them; and so there's no offence in putting them in my pocket."

"Oh, no, none at all!—none at all!" answered Bill Maltby; "but you'll not have to use them, sir, I can tell you."

"Likely," answered the officer; "but now let's go."

We have led the gentle reader, by the hand, all about the little town of Mallington, and the paths in that neighbourhood. If we had been the surveyor of the roads for that district, we could not

have laid them out with greater accuracy—all except one. Have you ever looked upon a map, dear reader, in which a river figured as the principal object?—you must have found that, if there was a bridge over it, the appearance generally presented was that of the letter H, the bridge forming the cross of the letter, and a road on either side the two limbs. Now our H wants one of its principal parts, which must be immediately supplied. That is neither more nor less than the superior portion of the left hand limb.

The highway through the village, which was called Mallington-street, taking a little turn round the angle formed by the inn, swept over the bridge. On the right hand it was joined by the road to the rectory and the church; but we have said nothing of any road, highway, or by-path, leading further up the river on the Mallington side, and we must hasten to correct this geographical error. The road from the church, the rectory, and the country beyond, did indeed enter upon Mallington-street, and afford a means of communication between the village and the neighbouring residences; but it did more—it crossed the high-way, and was continued along the bank of the river, sometimes approaching close to it, sometimes leaving a meadow or two

between, as the circuitous process of nature deviated from the straightforward proceeding of art.

It was up this road, then, that Bill Maltby, on the night in question, led Mr. Prior, shortly after the sun had sunk under the horizon. There was more light than the former personage had calculated upon; for though the evening was somewhat grey, and thin wreaths of white mist might be seen twisting about upon various parts of the stream, yet the twilight had not completely ended, and in many parts the river shone out clear. Bill Maltby walked slowly, and his companion did not hurry him on, but at the same time watched all his proceedings with a keen eye.

“He wants to prevent me finding my way here again,” said Prior to himself; “but it won’t do;” and then remarking that, as they came to the side of some meadows, left by a sweep of the stream with a footpath across them, Bill Maltby looked across, but still seemed inclined to follow the high road, though the footway evidently joined it further on, he asked aloud, “Had we better not take the path, Bill?—it’s shorter.”

Bill Maltby assented, merely murmuring something about its being damp; and then, after a short interval of silence, observed, “You seem to know this part of the country, Mr. Prior?”

“ Oh ! I know something of most parts,” replied the officer ; and on they went.

At the distance of about a mile from the village, it became as dark as it was likely to be, and about half a mile further Maltby deviated from the road they had hitherto been pursuing, and struck into some very intricate lanes upon the left. On the right was some high ground, and towards it the two wayfarers gradually approached, though Prior shrewdly suspected that they might have reached it by a much shorter cut. At length the lane they were pursuing entered between two abrupt sandy banks, crowned on either side by some young fir plantations, after which it issued forth upon a wide track of wild unproductive ground, where patches of cultivation, encircled by young hedges, amidst a quantity of moor-land, showed that efforts were making to reclaim for the use of man a portion of the soil from the waste. It was with difficulty that Prior’s eye, although accustomed a good deal to mark objects in the night, caught the indications of the sort of country he was passing through ; for the darkness was by this time profound, and no convenient moon shone forth. When they had gone about a quarter of a mile on the moor, however, near a clump of black-looking trees, which showed themselves more distinctly than any

object around, he thought he perceived one of those tall, single, many-storied houses, which people of a peculiar taste occasionally build upon commons, generally for the purpose of a roadside public-house. No ray of light, indeed, flashed forth from any window, and for some time the officer was not certain that fancy did not deceive him.

At length, however, Bill Maltby stopped, and after some humming and hawing, communicated to the officer that he thought he had better go on and inform the good folks of the business they had in hand. "I may tell them, of course, Mr. Prior," he said, "that they're all safe if they let you come?"

"As safe as a babe in the cradle," replied Prior. "You know me well enough, Bill, and what sort of man I am. I'm never afraid of doing anything I have to do straightforward, so I've never any occasion to tell lies about it."

"That's true—that's true," answered Maltby; "so, if you'll just wait here for five minutes, I'll go and tell them, and come back again."

Prior agreed to do so; and the young man left him, walking on in the direction of the house which he had seen. When he was gone, Prior put his hand in his pocket, took out one of the pistols, felt the pan with a delicate and scientific touch,

and then replaced it in his pocket, leaving the butt to hang out, so as to be ready for his grasp in a moment. All this did not in the least show that he was afraid; for, as I have before said, fear or hesitation were not things that easily entered into his mind; but he was eminently a man of preparation—he was always ready for whatever might come, and always making himself ready for what was to come next.”

Bill Maltby was longer in returning than he had promised; and Prior had full opportunity of examining to the best of his ability the objects round the spot where he stood. Notwithstanding the darkness, his habitual powers of observation were such as to enable him to mark accurately several different points, for the purpose of recognising the place again; and in order to leave no doubt of the matter, he walked up to a thin pollard that stood by the side of the road, and, taking a large knife out of his pocket, cut a deep notch in the bark.

At length, after waiting about a quarter of an hour, he heard a quick step, and, advancing, was met by Maltby, who said in a low voice, “Come, sir, come; they will speak with you; though they don’t like it at all.”

“They must be fools,” said Prior, “not to like to get a matter of twenty or five and twenty

pounds for some scraps of paper that they can do nothing with."

"That's what I told them," said Bill Maltby.

"Have they got them still?" asked Prior, as they walked along.

"I can't tell," answered his companion; "they didn't say; but you'll soon find out. However, Mr. Prior, it will be all in the dark, for they won't let you see them."

Prior made no reply. He did not much like the idea of going into a place with which he himself was unacquainted, tenanted apparently by a body of men of a daring and violent character, well acquainted with every turning and winding that it contained; but yet it did not make him pause or hesitate. He only bestowed a little meditation upon the means of insuring himself as far as possible; and consequently, when they came to the door of the desolate-looking building to which they went, he quietly slipped his hand into his pocket, drew out the two pistols, and, with the one in his right hand and the other in his left, followed Bill Maltby into the dark and narrow passage.

"This way," said his companion, turning through a door on the left; and, immediately the officer had entered, a harsh voice, apparently proceeding from a room beyond, communicating

with the first by an open door, demanded
“Who ’s there?”

“It’s I and Mr. Prior,” replied Maltby.

“Well, you can stay where you are,” rejoined the voice; “we can talk as we are without his coming further. What does he want?”

“Why I want Mr. Morton’s pocket-book, and the papers that are in it,” answered Prior.

“And why the devil should we give them to you?” rejoined the voice.

“I’ll tell you as soon as you let me know whether the papers are safe,” answered the officer.

“Oh! yes, safe enough,” replied the voice.
“Now for it, speak out.”

“Well, then,” said the officer, “I have been sent for from London in order to get them. The gentleman’s content, if they are restored, to let all other matters sleep, and to give a reward of twenty pounds for them. So, if you’ve a mind to hand them out, you can either let me have them now, or send them to me by Mr. Maltby here.”

There was a low murmuring at the other side of the partition, as if two people spoke together, and then the voice answered, “They are worth more than that.”

“Well, I dare say the gentleman won’t stand for five pounds,” answered the officer; “but you

know, if you ask too much, you may chance to get yourself into trouble; and it's much better to take a fair offer, than risk your neck in the hope of getting more."

"Oh! my neck's in no risk," answered the man. "I've not got the papers—I'm only speaking for another."

"I hear that," replied the officer, drily; "and I'm speaking for another, too."

There was a short pause; and at length a new voice said, "It's better that principals should deal together; so you may tell Mr. Morton that he shall hear from the person who has got the papers in a day or two, and then he can have them or not at the price put upon them, as he likes."

Since his entrance into that room, Prior had used his best endeavours to gain some knowledge of the interior, but without much success. He had marked, however, with strong attention, the tones of the two speakers, so that he thought he could swear to the voices whenever he heard them again. The proposal of the person who had last spoken was not agreeable to him, as he foresaw a possibility of its depriving him of a part, at least, of the sum promised for negotiating the restoration of the papers. Not that in proposing the sum of twenty, or five and twenty

pounds, instead of fifty, which Mr. Morton had offered, he was influenced by any corrupt desire of transferring the rest to his own pocket. On the contrary, he had only begun with the small sum, to leave himself room to increase it, according to circumstances; and he therefore answered, "Come, say in a word what you will take, and let us see whether we can't make a deal of it at once. It's better than hanging fire about the thing, because you see I must do my duty, and if I don't get the papers I must do the other thing."

"You've got your answer," said the second voice in a stern tone, "and that's all the answer you'll get."

"It's an answer that doesn't quite suit me," replied Prior quietly; "but I'll let you hear more what I think of it to-morrow."

"What! I suppose you are afraid of losing the reward," said the second voice; "but as you have opened the way for him, the gentleman will have no right to refuse you whatever he promised."

"You say you'll let him hear from you in a day or two," said Prior. "Well, I'll tell him, and talk with him about the matter. All I can say further is, that you'll be great fools if you suffer yourselves to be lagged up to the office by

sticking out for too high a price. Many a man has put his neck in a noose by such a go as that; so you look sharp about it."

While he had been thus speaking he had gradually approached the door as silently as possible, and in a minute after stood on the outside of the house. Comparatively the atmosphere without was clear and light after quitting the dark room, and Prior walked on towards Mallington without waiting for his companion. Maltby, however, soon overtook him, but the officer was in no very good humour; and the only words that passed between them till they reached the entrance of the town were spoken when Maltby endeavoured to lead him by another way, upon which the officer exclaimed:—"It's no use, Bill, I know the road as well as you do. You call upon me about twelve to-morrow, and I'll tell you more. Those fellows will make a mess of it, if they don't mind; but it's their own fault, so there's no help for it."

CHAPTER XIV.

It was at an early hour of the morning, not yet half-past five, when Mr. Morton crossed the bridge at Mallington on foot, with a double-barrelled gun under his arm, and a game-bag over his shoulder.

He took his way onward with a quick step, entered Mallington Park, and crossed it by a path which, making an angle of forty-five degrees both with the river and the road to the house, passed behind the latter at some distance. In that direction lay the favourite haunt of the deer, who seldom came down into the more trim and decorated part of the park near the river, except to drink in the cool moonlight; and here, to the shady groves and clumps of beech, and elm, and oak, succeeded a wide tract of tall fern or short dry grass, sprinkled over with numerous hawthorns. The sun had risen, it is true, but was not yet high enough to overtop the neighbouring

woods and hills; and the dew of the preceding evening lay thick and white upon the grass like a hoar-frost. The park was quite still and solitary, as far as the human race was concerned, but not so in regard to the wild creatures, who, following the warning voice of nature, wake up to the enjoyment or to the strife of the day with the first ray of the rising sun. The tall deer were already standing in herds, or stretching their long slender limbs amongst the fern, and on a broken sandy part of the ground innumerable rabbits were hopping about, till, startled by Morton's approaching foot, they bustled away into their burrows, terrified at the sight of the great general oppressor, man. A hawk hovered over head, watching for his prey; a glistening cock pheasant started from beneath a low holly-bush, as the young gentleman brushed it in passing; a hen partridge trotted off with her young covey; and a curlew, with its long wings, swept away towards the wilder and more barren country beyond the park. Morton, however, walked quietly on, with his gun still under his arm, till he reached the park-paling on the side next to the heath, and had crossed the tall stile leading to the sandy road on the other side. There he paused, and charged both barrels, examining the flints, and taking care that the priming was well and orderly disposed in the pan. This

being done, he crossed the heath in the direction of a clump of firs upon a little mound, and soon perceived, seated on the first rise of the ground, three stout men holding a couple of brace of dogs, with two or three young lads. At their head was Edmonds, the park-keeper, who, when Mr. Morton was within a hundred and fifty yards, advanced to meet him, and spoke a few words in a low tone.

“ Oh ! no,” replied Morton ; “ there is no danger, my good friend. Merely let one of the boys go with me to show me which is the path mentioned, and I will rejoin you in a few minutes. You would hear my gun, of course, at that distance ?”

“ Yes, sir,” answered Edmonds, “ no fear of that : the wind sets this way.”

“ Then, unless you do hear it, you need not move,” rejoined Morton ; “ if you do, you may as well come to seek me.”

While they had been speaking, they had walked on towards the trees ; and then one of the lads, having been selected from the rest, accompanied the young gentleman to the edge of Wenlock Wood, where the very path entered which had been pursued by Mr. Gibbs on his unfortunate expedition. There Mr. Morton left him, and, bidding him return to the keepers, walked on alone, with his gun resting easily on the inside of

his arm, so as to be brought forward at any moment without delay. The path I have before described. With a slow step, and not without caution, the young gentleman continued to advance, turning a keen and quick eye to the foliage on either side; for so severe and so unexpected a blow as he had recently received might well teach him watchfulness against a concealed assailant. He had gone about two hundred yards from the edge of the wood, when he thought he heard some murmuring, as of persons speaking low, at a little distance in advance, and he paused for a moment to ascertain the fact. All was silent again, however, and, thinking he had deceived himself, he walked on with a slow and quiet step. The trees were there close and thick, but a little beyond they opened out into a sort of wild scattered tract of woodland. The brighter light and freer air were just making themselves perceptible, when suddenly the voices were again heard, and Mr. Morton stopped, saying to himself "The letter assured me he would be alone." The next instant he had made up his mind to go on, and, proceeding at a quicker pace than before, he was soon in the open ground, where, to his surprise, he beheld the form of Mr. Gibbs himself, busily engaged, as it seemed, in pointing out to Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington, the spot

where he had been robbed. The sight of these two personages was by no means agreeable to Mr. Morton, on his present errand, and, wishing not to be interrupted, he was drawing back when the quick eye of the traveller fell upon him as his head and shoulders overtopped the brushwood that lay between.

"Ah, Mr. Morton—Mr. Morton!" exclaimed Gibbs; "we are nobody but friends here. You need not be alarmed, though it is such a murderous sort of place."

"I am not alarmed in the least, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton; "but I was not in search of society at present."

Mr. Gibbs, however, would not take the hint, replying with a knowing smirk, "In search of feathered bipeds, I presume. I was just pointing out to the good constable here the place where I was knocked down and robbed, for I can't help thinking that those fellows must have a rendezvous somewhere hereabouts."

"Not at all improbable," replied Morton, in a dry and discouraging tone. "The place looks very well fitted for such a purpose."

"Oh! I'm quite sure of it," rejoined Mr. Gibbs, "for, with my glass, I saw Jack Williams walk up to the edge of the wood yesterday afternoon, and Bill Maltby follow with another man about half an

hour after; and so we came up so early just to see if they had left any traces behind them."

"Have you discovered anything?" demanded Morton.

"No, sir," replied the constable, fixing his two hawk-like eyes upon him; "but I think we shall before we've done."

"Well, I wish you success," said the young gentleman, and walked on for about a quarter of a mile through the wood. He then returned, thinking that the traveller and his companion would have abandoned the pursuit by that time; but he found them seated on the stump of a tree, discussing some viands which Mr. Gibbs had brought with him; and, merely bowing his head in answer to their salutation, he walked on along the path. After which, rejoining the keepers on the common, he shot his way back through the fields on the other side of Malington Park.

Returning to the worthy traveller and his companion, Harry Soames, we must take some notice of their conversation after Morton passed them a second time.

"I wonder who that fellow is," said the constable, in a meditative tone.

"I dare say you do!" answered Mr. Gibbs, with a shrewd smile.

“What makes you say that in that sort of way, Mr. Gibbs?” rejoined the constable. “It was just as if you would have said ‘I could tell if I liked.’”

“Oh dear, no!” answered the traveller; “I didn’t say anything like it. I only said I dared say you do.”

“Well, I doubt that he’s after any good,” observed Mr. Soames.

“Pooh! nonsense,” said Gibbs; “what harm can he be about?”

“Why, a good deal, perhaps,” replied the constable. “Didn’t you see that when he caught sight of us he was for turning back, and then he only walked a little bit further and came round again. What should bring him up here at this hour of the morning?”

“Ay, that I can’t say,” was Mr. Gibbs’s reply. “He might have business, you know.”

“Ay, pretty business up here before six o’clock,” answered the constable.

“Why, he might say the same of us,” observed the traveller.

“That’s quite a different affair,” answered Harry Soames. “In the first place, I’m an officer, and have business everywhere. Then you told him what we were about at once.”

“Pooh! it’s all nonsense,” replied Mr. Gibbs,

"I've good reason to believe he's quite a gentleman."

"Ay, ay, because he's bought some of your stuff, I'll warrant you," rejoined the constable; "but let me tell you, Mr. Gibbs, that many a rascally clerk passes for a gentleman when he comes down to the country, after having cheated his employers, as long as he's got any of their money to spend."

"You know nothing about the matter," answered Gibbs, "and I know what I know. Mr. Morton's a gentleman and a man of property—I'm sure of that. Don't you see what a friend he is of Dr. Western's?"

"That's nothing to do with it," replied Soames; "there isn't a man more easily done in all England than the good doctor. I'm not the only one, I can tell you, that fancies there's something odd. One-half of the people of Mallington have their doubts; and it's only two days ago that a magistrate, who has as much cunning in his little finger as Dr. Western in his whole body, told me to keep an eye quietly upon a certain gentleman, because he had had information, though not on oath, that he isn't what he pretends to be. Hark! there goes a gun—both barrels, by Jupiter!—I'll bet you a pound he's poaching Mallington manor. He'd better not let Edmonds catch him, I can

tell him that, for he's not one to stand nonsense."

Such is the nature of calumny, that when adroitly put and pertinaciously supported, it still leaves a shade of suspicion even on the minds of people who have many good reasons for knowing its falsity. Even Mr. Gibbs began to think that Morton's conduct, especially that morning, was somewhat odd, and to ask himself if he might not be deceived—nay, if he might not have aided to deceive himself. He would not give up the young gentleman's cause so easily, however, and after a few minutes' cogitation, replied, "I dare say you would find now that Edmonds has given him leave to shoot for a day."

"I don't know," answered the constable, "but one thing I certainly shall do, and that is to tell Edmonds that some one has been up here with a gun, and who it was."

CHAPTER XV.

IN the course of human life, as society is now organised, with all its wheels and springs and mechanical contrivances for rendering everything regular, and securing precision in all affairs, there are certain moments of recurring interest, varying in every town, and perhaps in every family, when some particular event occurs each day, breaking the monotony of ordinary existence, and affording a brief space of bustle and activity to thoughts which otherwise might go on sleeping like dormice for long months at a time. One of these moments, in almost every house in the land, is that of the post's arrival.

As the reader already knows, or ought to know—for we have already told him in a preceding part of this tale, to which he may have occasion to refer more than once hereafter, and, therefore, if we have forgotten it, or passed over it as an incident of no consequence, he is very much in fault, every inci-

dent herein mentioned having its due bearing and relevant connection with all the rest, and with the end of all—the post came into Mallington in the middle of the night. Nevertheless, according to the system of those days, when slow and sure and dear and good were the maxims of locomotion and commerce, instead of quick and hazardous, cheap and nasty, the great principles of the present time, the letters were not delivered, at least at the further end of Mallington, till between nine and ten in the morning. Thus at Mallington House the urn was hissing on the table, Mrs. Charlton was putting in the tea, and Morton was bending slightly over the table to speak some light and casual words to Louisa, when in came the butler, and put down three letters to the lady of the house and two to Mr. Morton. Those received by Mrs. Charlton certainly did not seem to be of a very pleasant nature from the effect they produced on her countenance. The two which came to her guest were of very different shapes and qualities. One was a large and voluminous packet, costing an immense sum of postage, for Rowland Hill was not then in operation. The second was a smaller epistle, and by no means displaying the neat and tidy exactness which characterised the other, either in folding, sealing, or address. It was a shabby-looking parallelogram, with the name of the gentle-

man for whom it was intended written in the right-hand corner, Mallington House in the left, and Mallington underneath, in a most unsymmetrical and anomalous position.

As Morton, however, had received a similar letter three days before, and divined whence it came, he opened it first, when his eye was greeted with the following communication:—

“Sir—You behaved like a gentleman and a man of honour this morning, for I saw all that went on, though nobody saw me. So, if you like to come up into Mallington Park about eight o’clock to-night, we’ll talk about the papers which are quite safe, and I think I can get them for you. I don’t ask you to come to the same place, because I think you might not like it at that hour of the night; but I’ll be down in the park at that time, somewhere near the rabbit warren at the back of the house. If you’ll stand out from the trees I shall see you, and I know you are too much of a gentleman to take advantage. You’ll be quite safe yourself, for that I pledge my honour.”

No name was signed, and after having read the letter Morton put it in his pocket and opened the other epistle. The cover contained various papers, apparently from the hands of a lawyer, and as Mrs. Charlton quietly glanced her eye across, she saw sufficient to make her divine that one was a

power of attorney. Within the whole was a note upon neat paper, written in a nice clean business-like hand, to the following effect :—

“ MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

“ Allow me to call you so, and to thank you for your invitation. The partridges must wait if they will, and fly away if they won't, for I am tied to London till October. Then, by your good leave, I'll see if I cannot bring down some of the pheasants, with their long tails behind them.. If *ifs* and *ands* were pots and pans we could do without the paper, as you say; but the law knows no such thing as an *if*. It is a positive science, my dear sir, and very positive indeed in its way. It will have all the proofs it can lay hold of; and, though too much pudding may choke a dog, the gullet of the law is much more capacious; and, though occasionally it strains at a gnat, is more frequently inclined to swallow a camel. Get the paper if you can, but don't give too much for it, as, though it forms a link, it is but a small one; and we can prove the death by other means, though expensive ones, I fear. However, it is just as well to bring over an Italian priest and an English consul as to bribe a British thief too high. Don't walk upon commons too late any more; for your head, I think, must show you by this time that a pitcher

never goes so often to the well but it comes home broken at last. I will send you down a clerk in the course of to-morrow to take your signatures to the papers enclosed when you have looked over them, and, in the mean time, you will believe me,

“Your faithful servant,

“T. QUATTERLY.”

“P. S. The clerk I send is a great scamp, so do not trust him with money. I keep him to look after insolvents and fraudulent bankrupts. Set a thief to catch a thief.

“T. Q.”

Mr. Morton made no comment upon his letters, but Mrs. Charlton was evidently disturbed with the contents of hers for the rest of the day, and passed a part of the afternoon writing. The same evening's post carried away from Mallington three neatly written, beautifully-folded, and exactly-sealed notes, addressed to “Messrs. — and —, jewellers, New Bond-street;” “Mrs. —, dealer in British and Foreign lace, Conduit-street;” and “Messrs. —, silk mercers, &c., Piccadilly.”

Mrs. Windsor looked at them all with careful attention, and observed in a murmuring tone to herself, “It won't do much longer, ma'am, I can tell you. You'll have to play your trump, or

you 'll lose the odd trick. I wonder what she can be waiting for, I should think the pear was quite ripe."

After dinner, however, Morton announced that he had a little business to transact, but would be back shortly; and, going to his room, he furnished his pockets with a brace of pistols, and proceeded towards the rendezvous which had been given him by letter as we have seen. Taking little heed of whom he met, the young gentleman walked down the hill, crossed the bridge, and at once obtained admission into Mallington Park. Then, leaving the keeper's house and the hall to the left, he followed nearly the same course which he had pursued on his shooting excursion two days before, and was soon at the spot appointed. He there paused and gazed around him, but it was now quite dark, no moon up, and the sky somewhat cloudy. The tall trees falling into thick masses, indeed, could be seen sweeping round through the dim night air, but there was no more light left than to show the grander objects at a distance, and to transform the smaller ones into strange shapes as fancy lent them form and members. Under one of the hawthorns Morton at first fancied that he saw a man seated, but presently he perceived that it was the withered stump of an old tree, and going a little further forward into the open space, after having

waited about three minutes, he asked aloud if any one was there.

The moment after he heard a slight rustle amongst the thicker trees, and then clearly distinguished a human form advancing with a quick step towards him. Morton kept his position, however, examining the stranger as he approached, and gaining every instant a stronger and stronger conviction that it was no other than Jack Williams, who had given him such serviceable assistance on the common. In a few minutes the man was by his side, and, without any attempt at concealment, addressed him at once with "Good-evening, Mr. Morton ; you walk late, sir."

"So do you, it seems," replied Morton ; "but business brings me here, as it brought me to the common when first I saw you." He paused, and as Williams made no immediate reply, added, "When I found you here, Mr. Williams, I imagined that your coming had some reference to the business I allude to."

"Perhaps it has," answered the sailor, and then he stopped and seemed to hesitate.

Morton was not altogether pleased with this conduct, and although, from the manner in which the man had aided him when injured and bleeding on Mallington Common, he had believed the suspicions of the Bow-street officer to be totally un-

founded, he now could not help supposing that Williams had had some share in the outrage, if he had not actually committed it. "Well," he said, "I am here to communicate with any person regarding the recovery of my property—property which is valuable to me, though of no use to the persons who have taken it, and if you can give me such information as will enable me to regain it, I am willing to reward you handsomely for the service rendered."

"We will see about that, sir," answered Williams; "but there are first one or two things to be settled. Now, if I tell you who took your pocket-book, will you give me your word of honour, as a gentleman, that you will never proceed against him by the law for taking it?"

"No," replied Morton at once; "I will not give you any such pledge, as it is undoubtedly my intention if he refuses to give it up to proceed against him. However, I will give you my word of honour that if he does give it up I will take no steps against him of any kind, either for taking it or any other part of the affair."

"That won't do, sir," answered Williams, in a determined but not uncivil tone; "and I'll show you why. You and he might not be able to agree about terms; then the information I gave you might put his neck in a halter, so that you

would have all the advantage in driving the bargain."

"I understand what you mean," replied Morton; "but it is not at all my object, believe me, to gain the advantage you mention; and I am quite willing to pledge my honour that I will use the information you give me in no way whatever against him. The case shall stand exactly upon the same ground on which it stood before our meeting. If that will suit you, well and good; if not, we had better converse no more upon the subject, for my mind is made up, and I can promise nothing further."

"That is all I meant," replied Williams; "I meant that we should start fair, and that if I told who the man is that took your pocket-book, and gave you the means of communicating with him directly you shouldn't be able to turn round upon him and say: 'Now I know who you are, if you don't do just as I like I'll hang you.'—But now for it. You want first to hear who has got your papers—I have, sir."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Morton in a serious tone.

"Ay! and why should you be sorry?" asked Williams, very much struck with the young gentleman's manner.

"Because," replied Morton; "I thought better

of you—because I have deceived myself in regard to your character, and, from your whole demeanour and conduct, assured Prior, the officer, that you had nothing to do with the assault upon me, or the robbery which was afterwards committed.”

“You were quite right, sir; and, for once in this world, a gentleman has done me justice,” replied Williams. “If every one had judged so from the beginning I should not have done half the bad things I have done. Nevertheless, knocking you down, and taking your money or your pocket-book, is not against me on the ship’s books; and I would have stopped it all if I had come up in time. The pocket-book came into my hands by accident, but having got it, I think I’ve a right to drive a bargain about giving it back again.”

“I should have imagined,” replied Morton, “that a man who shows so much good feeling upon some points as you do, would have been rather inclined to restore it to its owner, and to trust to his gratitude for recompense.”

“Pooh, trust to any one’s gratitude!” said Williams, with a scoff; “that will never do. However, I did mean to have given it back to you, but for circumstances. The truth is, sir, I’ve got things to do which will make or mar me, and I must have five hundred pounds.”

“Then am I to consider,” asked Morton, “that

such is the price you put upon the papers in your possession?"

"Yes, sir," replied Williams. "I know their value to you as well as you do, and they are worth that."

"You must know their value better than I do," answered the young gentleman, laughing, "if you put such a price upon them, for certainly I will not give it."

"Then, d—n me if I do not burn them!" cried Williams, more irritated by the tone in which Mr. Morton spoke than by his mere refusal to grant such an exorbitant demand.

"In that you'll act as you think fit," replied Morton; "but of this be assured, that the papers are not of the value to me you suppose. I have means of proving the facts to which they refer, which may, indeed, cost a certain sum, but not near so much as you require; and I am not at all disposed to pay largely for the recovery of papers taken from me by a gross act of violence, when I can do without them."

The man muttered a curse of angry disappointment, but made no direct reply, and, after having waited for a minute or two in expectation of some answer, Morton proceeded to say, "You will probably think better of this, but I give you warning that the expense likely to be created by the loss

of these papers, as calculated by my solicitor, is about two hundred pounds, and, consequently, that your modified demand, whatever it may be, must be within that sum. You can let me hear your determination before to-morrow night, after which it will be too late to make any change."

"D—n me, if I don't burn them," was Williams's only reply, and Morton turned and walked away.

He passed through the thicker trees; and entered upon the open space beyond, at the back of Mallington Hall, thinking, as he walked on, that he heard the sound of a heavy fall, as if something had dropped from one of the beeches by the way. As he came upon the little rising ground which commanded the greater part of the park, the glistening waters of the stream could just be seen over the woody ground in the bottom, affording a bright back-ground to the slope below him; and there, thrown out by the shining of the river, Morton, to his surprise, beheld the figure of a man running quickly down the hill in the direction of the Park gates.

CHAPTER XVI.

IMAGINATION is a great and wonderful endowment. By it the powers of conception are extended, first from the actual to the probable, and then from the probable to the possible. Without it no great discovery would ever have been made, unless by the mere effect of accident; without it few of the fine or noble enterprises which chequer the dull plodding of earth's ordinary course with spots of life would ever be undertaken; without it the brightness of everything that is fine and beautiful would fade away into the leaden greyness of hard reality. It is, in fact, the light of life; and as the material world without the rays which bring its loveliness to the sense of the eye could only be felt in its harsh outline, so to the world of the mind all that exists would lose its colouring and its splendour, and sink into mere stern tangible forms but for imagination. Yet there may be too much light; there may be lights that dazzle, lights that deceive; and that portion which serves not to illustrate acts to blind. Thus with imagination,

too ; unless duly regulated, it operates but in rendering indistinct, confused, and uncertain, the moral vision ; sometimes deceiving, sometimes blinding the eye that is opened to too broad a glare. Such is the case, most frequently and most fatally, in regard to the expectations of man. These are almost always exorbitant, and, when indulged in, are full of fearful disappointments, leading, not unfrequently, to reckless folly, vice, and crime. By the natural transition of which we have spoken, from the actual to the probable, and from the probable to the possible, imagination gives us the power of conceiving not only all that is, but all that may be, and if we stopped there, no harm would ensue. On the contrary, however, vanity, desire, hope, and all human passions mislead us into confounding the various modes or forms of our own conceptions—lead us to imagine that that which is likely is sure, and that which is possible is likely. When we have discovered our mistake, we will not admit that it originated in our own folly or our own fault—we do not blame ourselves for neglecting to put imagination under the guidance of judgment, and we are angry with fate because it will not conform to the schemes we have laid out, or with our fellowmen because they have disappointed expectations which an unrestrained imagination led passion unreasonably to entertain.

Such was the case with the man Williams, as he stood where Morton had left him. He muttered

curses, he framed a thousand fierce and rash plans, and he thought alone of avenging himself upon others for a disappointment which nothing but fancy had taught him to entertain. In the pocket-book which had fallen into his possession, he had discovered papers which he had immediately perceived must be very important to the owner. He had fixed an imaginary value upon them, and had not entertained the slightest doubt of obtaining the sum that he desired. He had gone on in his own mind to employ that sum in the execution of schemes he had long brooded over. He had buoyed himself up with hopes, and delighted in prospects which were all founded on the vain supposition that Morton would immediately accede to his demand. Those hopes and prospects, it must be acknowledged, were in themselves criminal. It was no scheme of a calm and tranquil life—of honest industry and domestic peace—that he laid out before him; it was no expectation even of a relief from labour or of a mitigation from toil. It was a life of enterprise and exertion that he pictured to himself—of strife, and danger, and excitement, as a rover of the seas. There were, it is true, to be moments of calm repose, hours of dalliance and passion, scenes of soft enjoyment and luxurious ease, interspersed with the fierce energy of a pirate's life. But the great object and end was freedom from all restraint, the active exercise of a strong and turbulent will, the constant stimulus of peril and adventure. It must be said—not exactly

in his justification, for justification there is none, but in order to put the matter before the reader exactly as it presented itself to his mind—that, as habit is as powerful over thought as over action, he did not at all consider the course he proposed to himself as criminal. He had in his ship, when in the Mediterranean, seen others following the same life, and he had worked himself up to believe that any individual who chose to run the risk had as much right to declare war against the whole human race as a king against a neighbouring state.

In the case of Williams, however, it was natural that, as the objects proposed were criminal, and the means of attaining them were anything but honest and just, his disappointment should lead him to meditate still more dark and violent means of effecting the same purpose; and one of his first exclamations, after venting many a bitter imprecation, was “By —! I will have the money one way or another! I will not be baulked and kept here for months, or perhaps shut up in prison, for fear of striking a good stroke. I did not wish to stir up these people here; or to fish in troubled waters among these dull, plodding, shop-keeping people of England; but now they shall find what I can do;” and, with his eyes bent down in meditation, he turned away and walked towards the further corner of the park, near which, as before described, a stile led over the wall to a spot where some cottages had been built beyond. His rapid footfalls caught the ear of some persons

actually within the wall of the park, for a voice exclaimed, as he came near, "It must be he, though he's devilish quick back;" and at the same moment the speaker advanced to meet him, adding, "Is that you, Mr. Williams?—have you got it?"

"No, not a farthing, Bill," answered Williams; "and hang me if I don't go home and burn them all;" and he added a bitter oath.

"That's unlucky, upon my life!" added Bill Maltby; "and you wanted to go as soon as possible, too. Couldn't you and he make a deal of it?"

"No," replied Williams; "he thinks to get them for nothing; but he'll find himself devilish much mistaken—Go! to be sure I want to go!" he continued, pursuing in a rambling manner the subject suggested by his companion; "but I'll make a sweep before I go, however; and once I'm at Portsmouth or Plymouth they may hunt long enough before they find me."

"Don't you think," inquired Bill Maltby, in a suggestive kind of manner, "that if you keep about this place long you may have Prior, or some more unpleasant customers still, down here looking after you? I think if I were you I'd be off to-morrow morning."

"Not unless there's something to be done to-night," answered Williams, doggedly; "I will not go without the money I want—Besides," he added, after a moment's consideration, "there's no such

hurry. He said he would give me till to-morrow night to consider of it; and I can keep him in play about the papers for two or three days more. But I'm resolved to have what I want, any way—Hark ye, Bill, was that Brown you were speaking to?"

"Yes," answered Bill Maltby; "he's a little in the wind, and wouldn't budge, though I told him it was you."

"All the better," answered Williams. "You were talking to me the other day about a lot of things up at the Hall. I've a great mind to try it to-night."

"We had better wait till it's daylight," said Bill Maltby, in a low tone; "then we could contrive to get the two women out of the way, and slip in without any breaking. I know quite well the room where it is all kept. We could hand it out of the window one to the other, and if we were caught it would make a difference, you know."

"I see no difference at all," replied Williams sharply.

"Oh! but it would at a trial," answered Bill Maltby. "It makes all the difference in life. If you break through a door and only take a silver spoon you're pretty sure to tighten your cravat; but if you slip in and take a thousand pounds you get off for a taste of Botany."

Bill Maltby had not yet reached the point of burglary, and he feared to put his foot upon that

round of the ladder. But Williams had no such hesitation, and he replied, "I think you're turning coward, Bill. Ay, and fool too. Are you not quite sure that if we tried it in the daylight we should be stopped in the middle of the work, and only get grabbed for our pains? If we get in to-night the matter's quite sure. We can lock up the women, and be off at once, so that we can be out of harm's way before any one knows anything about it."

"But suppose we shouldn't find a ship ready to sail?" said Maltby.

"Why, you don't suppose I'm going to freight a ship?" said Williams. A boat is the thing, and that can always be hired when one has money. Now, you say there's plenty of stuff here."

"Oh! ay," answered Bill Maltby, "to the tune of two or three thousand pounds, and a great deal of it in gold cups and such like, which could be easily packed."

"We'll beat it up altogether for that matter," answered Williams; "that's soon done. Two or three thousand pounds. That's worth fetching, Bill. Have you got a tool with you?"

"Nothing but a screw-driver," answered Bill Maltby, in a low and faltering voice; for though a share in the plunder tempted him strongly, and though a man ever ready for a scuffle, yet the idea of a new crime which would render the whole of the rest of life insecure, filled him with apprehensions that he could not banish.

"Give it to me," was Williams's only reply; and

having received a large turnscrew, which Maltby drew out of his pocket, he ran his hand over it, feeling its thickness and its length, and murmuring to himself, "I would rather it had been a crowbar; but this will do. Now, Bill," he said, "we had better set to work at once; but let us see how we must arrange. That fellow Brown is fit for nothing but hard work. You saw he had nearly spoiled the whole affair with the beak. I'll take the cracking the darkeners upon myself; then Tom shall come in to help me; and you, who are sharp and quick, shall keep a look out."

"We shall all go snacks, of course?" said Bill Maltby, who did not like the idea of a smaller share of the plunder.

But Williams turned sharply upon him, replying, "Of course! Do you fancy I'm not a man of honour?"

Alack and a-well-a-day, what a wonderful thing honour is!

Bill Maltby was very well satisfied with Williams's arrangement, for the part therein assigned to himself was decidedly the least perilous and the most profitable; and under this view of the case he made no further objection to proceeding immediately to business. Accordingly, Williams and he walked up to the corner where Tom Brown had been left, and where he was found sound asleep with his back against the park wall. He was speedily roused, however, and a short conversation, in a low tone, ensued; in the course of

which Brown showed that, with all his apparent dulness, he had occasionally a shrewd conception of the dangers and the probabilities of anything that was to be undertaken.

“No, no, Master Williams,” he said; “wait a bit—wait a bit. It isn’t nine o’clock yet, and Edmonds and the keepers are always on the look out about the park till half-past nine or ten. You’ll be sure to have some of them upon you; but if you wait till after ten they’ll be all snug and snoring. The women, too, will then have gone to bed, so you’ll have no piping; and we can sit here under the wall for an hour quite well.”

This argument was unanswerable; and taking up a position in which it was impossible for any one to see them without approaching very close, these three very respectable visitors to the park sat down to while away the time till the hour approached for the execution of their scheme.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE act of waiting for the execution of a dangerous and criminal scheme is apt to fill the projector thereof—at least, in many cases—with doubts, hesitations, and fears not very favourable to energetic operations. This, indeed, does not always obtain, but the effect is modified by the character of the individual. Now, there were three men seated under the wall of Mallington Park, and of those three, only one experienced the apprehensive hesitation to which we have referred. Williams was of too stern and determined a character to be susceptible of its influence. Tom Brown was too dull and stolid to suffer imagination to trouble him at all upon such subjects. Bill Maltby, on the contrary, sat doubting and shrinking within himself, every instant feeling more unwillingness to go forward in the scheme; not from any sense of its criminality, but from those vague, but not less tremendous, phantoms of danger, punishment, and death, which, in the pauses of crime—when neither the spirit of adven-

ture nor the excitement of action carries us through unthinking—come upon the heart of most men engaged in wicked deeds. He contemplated all the chances, he magnified all the dangers. A few minutes before, and he fancied he could secure his own escape, at all events; but now he thought he might very possibly be taken in running away from the spot, if they should be interrupted; and then, again, he pictured, by the power of fancy, his apprehension with a part of the plundered property in his possession in case they should be successful. Then came the images of a prison, a court, examination, trial, and execution; the pinioning the arms—the solemn procession from the cell—the priestly exhortation—the fatal drop—the gaping multitude—the shivering touch of the cord—the choking agony—the death, and the wide awful misty hereafter! All that he had shut out from thought for years—all that he had neglected or despised—every rejected warning—every inducement to better things cast away—each awful point in the fate and future of the criminal—each anguish of the heart and of the body which follow like hell-hounds upon the course of the guilty were all present to his mind, at once growing into fearful distinctness in the darkness and silence of the hour.

It was a warm September night, but he felt it cold, a shivering sensation crept down his back, and over his limbs, he felt his arms tremble as he rested them, with his hands upon his knees; he

could scarce keep his teeth from chattering in his head. A terrible thing—a very terrible thing is the expectation of crime !

The wind set from the side of Mallington, and though it was so low as scarcely to stir the trees, it at length brought, sweetly sweeping over the stream, the soft and musical tones of the village clock as it struck ten. Williams instantly started up and shook Brown by the shoulder, saying in a low voice, “Now, there’s ten, and that d—d moon’s getting up, I can see by the light aloft there. Let us get to work. You, Tom, go round by the path up over the hill, and meet us just behind the house. I’ll go with Bill and plant him where he can see all round. Come along, Bill.”

Maltby recovered in some degree from the effects of his imaginary terrors, as soon as he was once more in activity, but still his nerve was shaken, and ever and anon, as they hurried on through the dark close walks of the wood, he started and looked round as if he fancied that some hand was stretched out to seize him. His demeanour had not passed without observation by his companion, who, though incapable of dread himself, had seen what it produced in other men too often not to recognise the indications thereof; and if Maltby had looked to Williams’s face, and had been able, by the faint light of that hour, to distinguish its expression, he would have seen a scornful smile curling the corner of his stern lip at what he internally called his pitiful chicken

heartedness. The sailor made no observation, however ; but, keeping as far as possible under the shadow of the trees till they were within about fifty yards of the house, he crossed over suddenly to a wide-spreading elm that stood out clear from the rest near the eastern angle of the building, and then stopping, pointed down to a spot beneath the branches, saying, "There ! stand there ; you can see pretty well all round but on the west. Keep your eyes busy and your ears too." He spoke slowly and low ; and then added, fixing his eyes firmly upon his companion's face, "If a man quits his post, fails to give warning, or betrays his comrades, we shoot him through the head ; and if I should not be here to do it, there are friends of mine who will."

"On my life and soul ! Williams," said Maltby, "I will be as steady as a rock. Did I not first put you up to the thing ?"

"Yes," answered Williams ; "and then got poltroonish when it was to be done. Look to it—that's all. You shall have your full share ; but if you flinch you shall have lead instead of silver, by — !"

Thus saying he left him ; and Maltby, with mingled shame and indignation, remained gazing for a moment sullenly upon the ground. He then raised his eyes, and with them followed his companion towards the house, saw him joined by another man, and then marked the shadowy forms of both glide all along that side of the building,

seeming to examine every window and door attentively. He himself carried his glance over the whole of that façade; but all was dark and sombre. No light from any casement told that there was waking life within; and except on the eastern side, where the moonlight showed the windows, and even the joints of the rough stone, the whole edifice was buried in deep shadow.

After having neglected for some time the task assigned to him, in watching his companion's movements, the sentinel began to gaze forth over the park. Suddenly, with a start, he heard a loud sound, as of some strong plank riven asunder; and, turning his eyes quickly towards the house, he could distinguish, though by no means clearly, the two men standing apparently close together before one of the windows on the ground floor, near the north-eastern angle. The window-shutters of that story were all external; and Maltby well understood that the operation of breaking in had begun; but the noise terrified and shook him; and he instantly cast a hasty glance over the park, as if that sound could have already wakened up servants and keepers. He looked first to the westward, where all was still, and nothing to be seen—not even a deer; and then he gazed to the south, in the direction of Edmonds's house. It was not to be descried, however, being hidden by the trees and undulations of the ground. Running his eye along towards the east, his heart began to beat and his limbs to shake, for he

thought he saw two or three figures, a long way off, but advancing towards the hall; and raising his hand to his eyes he endeavoured to clear them of all mist, fearful lest the terror that he felt might deceive him. He then beheld the same objects more distinctly; they were clearly men; and they were coming forward rapidly. At the same moment a shivering crash met his ear, as if one of the panes of the window had been broken; and after an instant's hesitation as to whether he should at once provide for his own safety, or warn his companions, shame prevailed. He saw that the men who were advancing were yet far from the spot. There was time to save all; and, darting across, he seized Williams's arm just as it was throwing up the sash of the window which had been opened by thrusting a hand through the broken glass.

"There are people coming!" cried Maltby. "Run, quick—there are people coming, I tell you!"

But Williams was in the fierceness of active exertion, and he replied, casting up the window, "I don't believe it—it's a lie—you are afraid, and fancy it. Run round, Tom, and look out."

But, ere the words were well uttered, the alarumbell of the hall began to ring; and, snatching up the turnscrew which had fallen down, Williams hurried to the angle and looked round. Tom Brown and Maltby were already many yards towards the wood; but the bolder ruffian stood and

gazed forth for an instant ere he also took flight. Then muttering "It is true, by — !" he passed again into the shadow of the house, cut across the open space towards the trees, and was soon among the wood walks. The alarum-bell still rang out its angry peal as hard as the hands of the two frightened women in Mallington Hall could pull it, and the sounds were borne to the ear of Williams as he doubled and turned amidst the tortuous paths. Instead of flying in the same direction as his two comrades, who ran towards the common at the back of the park and Wenlock Wood, he made the best of his way to the river, and, as silently as possible, waded in, and then swam over. Passing quickly through the back lanes, he entered Mallington-street by a narrow alley, just above the surgeon's house, and then at a slow pace descended the hill towards the inn. Several persons were still moving about in the village, and one of the first whom Williams met was Mr. Soames, the constable. Nor did he fail to stop and talk with him for a moment or two in a calm and easy tone, saying that he was just going to get a dram before he went to bed. While they were still conversing they were joined by Mr. Crump, who, in a voice of some trepidation, informed the constable that he thought he heard the alarum-bell of the hall ringing. He had been just undressing, with his high window open, and was startled by the sound ; but he could not quite

swear that it was the alarum-bell, as the wind set the other way.

“D—n it! let us go and see,” said Williams; and the three hurried down to the bridge and listened. All was now still, however; the bell had ceased its warning tones long before, for Mr. Crump had been somewhat long in getting on his clothes; and, concluding that he had made a mistake, the constable and Williams returned, after waiting near the gates of the park for about five minutes. As they trod their way back, the clock struck eleven, and punctual Mrs. Pluckrose had closed her house for the night. Williams was not sorry that such was the case; for he had foreseen that if he entered the inn, to get the draught he had pretended to be seeking, his wet clothes might be more apparent than was agreeable; but he affected some disappointment, and, with an oath at the good landlady for her punctuality, he bade Soames good-night, and walked up the hill.

While such had been the proceedings of Jack Williams, the three keepers, who, with Edmonds at their head, had been out later than usual, hurried up to the hall, attracted by the sound of the alarum-bell. As they advanced they clearly caught sight of a man’s figure crossing towards the wood, and two of the men set off in pursuit as hard as they could run; but the course which Williams had followed deceived them, and it is only necessary to say that their hunt was vain.

Edmonds went straight up to the hall, and rang the door bell; but it was long ere the two terrified women would give him admission. When he was permitted to enter, they both at once informed him, with all the loquacity of terror, that they had been roused by a loud noise from the lower story, and, on looking out, had seen two men busily engaged in breaking into the house.

With few questions Edmonds proceeded to the spot, the women following at a respectful distance; and there he found the window broken and thrown up, the fastenings of the shutters forced off, and part even of the woodwork shivered. The park-keeper gazed at it in silence for a moment or two, and then returned, locking the door of that room.

“They are gone for to-night, Mrs. Chalk,” he said; “but I will leave one of the men with you when they come back; and, for the future, I will sleep up at the hall myself, at least till the house is full of people again, which I hope will not be long first.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT the distance of about two-and-twenty miles from Mallington, with a ridge of hills between the two places, which rendered the communication between them slow and infrequent, was a town containing some five thousand inhabitants and three distinct parishes and churches. It was a busy little bustling place, with a tolerable commerce and several manufactories; and the people minded their own business more and other people's less than was the case in Mallington. In the parish of Stephen the Martyr, in this town, it so happened that Edmonds, the park-keeper, had been born and married, and there, too, the year before he entered the service of the Earl of Mallington, had his daughter Lucy first seen the light. Her name, consequently, appeared in the parish register, which is a matter of some importance to this tale. Alfred Latimer had neither been born in Mallington nor in the aforesaid parish of St. Stephen, but in the City of London; and it so

happened that he knew his parish, which is what every man cannot say.

However that may be, as the parish of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the country town of which we have been speaking, extended a little way into the country, it contained in its outskirts many a pleasant little cottage; and one of these—the name of which, “Prospect Cottage,” appeared in embossed letters on the front—was situated in a garden, and was the property of a gardener, who let his first-floor, furnished, to any ladies or gentlemen in want of a lodging. Why it was called Prospect Cottage is in some degree a mystery. It was indeed in a very retired and unobtrusive situation, little to be seen itself and seeing little of anything or anybody.

In the front room, on the first floor, which was neatly furnished as a sitting room, sat Alfred Latimer with Lucy Edmonds. Poor Lucy was a good deal changed since the fatal period of quitting her father’s house; she was thinner, paler, sadder; but perhaps the character of her beauty was that which is increased by changes that affect, detrimentally, the loveliness that depends chiefly upon youth; and certainly it would have been difficult to find anything more interesting, more fair, more graceful than she looked as she sat before him to whom she had become a slave, and who had already too sadly shown her that he could become a tyrant.

She wept not—she had, indeed, given over

weeping, for she found that it irritated and annoyed him, and though it was often a terrible and bitter struggle to restrain the tears that were ever ready to burst forth, yet she had gained the mastery of them, and with meek and patient endurance strove to temper the bitterness of her fate. Sad she could not help being ; but even her sadness provoked her betrayer, though he could find no excuse for anger, as she complied with his lightest word. Yet, with the perversity of his character, he was not pleased even with this placid obedience ; he would fain have had matter for complaint, cause for quarrel. Not that he was already sated, and wished to cast off the unhappy girl whom he had so basely betrayed. He loved Lucy, after his fashion, as much as he could love anything, and if he wished for cause of offence, it was not that he might have an excuse for parting with her, but solely that he might have an opportunity of tyrannizing. She gave him no occasion, however, and his only resource was to torment her with hopes and fears about their marriage. It is true he wavered, and had wavered from the first, as to whether he would wed her or not. He had at first feared that by giving her such a tie upon him he might lose his slave, but as he saw more of her disposition he lost that apprehension ; and the very bitterness and obstinacy of his character, inclined him more and more to keep his word. He had not forgotten the stern and severe language which poor Edmonds himself had used in speak-

ing of his marriage with Lucy, and it seemed to him some sort of revenge to marry her in her parents' despite. He thought that he would make a great lady of her, that he would take her to Mallington in finery and splendour; but that, as her father had said he would rather see her dead than his wife, she should hold no communication with her parents, but treat them as aliens for ever. Thus at his heart he had really determined to keep his word; but yet he could not refrain from leaving her in doubt upon the subject—from alarming her with affected hesitations—from reminding her that, up to the last moment, it was in his power to do as he pleased.

Though the banns had been published twice, and but a few days were to elapse ere they were to be published a third time, he had that very morning put her in mind that the publication was nothing, adding, "You know, Lucy, we need not be married, after all, unless we like it."

Lucy's eyes were ready to run over, and her heart beat like that of a prisoner bird in the hand of one of the young tormentors of a school, but she conquered her emotion and only replied, "Oh, Alfred, do not break my heart!"

"Why should it break your heart, silly girl?" asked Alfred Latimer. "What the better will you be for having a ring on your finger?"

Lucy shook her head sadly, but would not utter her thoughts aloud; and their further conference was interrupted by the landlady's daughter com-

ing to say there was a gentleman below who desired admission.

Alfred Latimer asked several questions of the girl in regard to the appearance of the person who desired to see him, and then exclaimed "Well, d—n him! show him up, whoever he is;" and then, bidding Lucy go into the inner room, he threw himself back in an arm chair, watching the door.

What was his surprise, however, when he beheld Captain Tankerville enter with a gay familiar air, as if they had parted the best friends upon the face of the earth.

"Ah, my dear Latimer, glad to see you! I found you out, you see. 'Pon my life a very pretty looking place! What a nice garden you've got—better than the Surrey side of the bridges—and where's *madame*?"

Cool impudence is certainly a very wonderful thing, for although it cannot do everything, yet it can do a great deal more, and does do a great deal more, in all the affairs of life than any one suspects. Many a man of very moderate abilities rises to the first offices in church and state by its influence alone. Every class of successful men, but one, owes it a good deal in the progress towards power, wealth, or honour. It may be asked which is the one class we have excepted? It is the very small, narrow, circumscribed class of truly great men—the colossal statues of which the world has not room for many.

Though almost all men are more or less impressive by cool impudence, yet some are peculiarly so, and such was the case with Alfred Latimer. We have already hinted that a foolish sort of shyness had been one of the early causes of many another fault in his career; and shy men, except under very great and trying circumstances, which bring out the energies that are sometimes latent in their nature, are almost always very much overawed by impudence in others. Captain Tankerville, in the character of bully and bravo, Alfred Latimer had shown himself ready to meet, and competent to deal with; and had he appeared in the same humour on the present occasion, the young gentleman would have kicked him down stairs without the least ceremony. But his cool, easy, pleasant impudence, Mr. Latimer did not know how to manage. At first he looked grave and even stern; but it was irresistible. Captain Tankerville saw no coldness, noticed no frown, seemed to have forgotten all that had passed upon the common, all talk of horsewhips and production of pistols. It seemed as if every scene had been obliterated between the spunging-house and that cottage drawing-room, and as if he were still Mr. Latimer's very good friend and boon companion. Such sort of forgetfulness of things that we don't want to remember, has undoubtedly an infectious operation upon those who may not be quite so much inclined to forget, yet, as in the case of inoculation for small-pox, the disease is generally produced in a milder form,

and people do remember a little. Even Alfred Latimer did not become altogether placable at once, and inquired, in a cold tone, what was Captain Tankerville's business with him.

"Come, come, Latimer," cried Captain Tankerville, "don't let's think of what is past. I behaved like a d—d fool, and am quite ready to admit it; but the truth is I was half mad for want of money, and when a man is in that state, you know, he will quarrel with his best friend."

Against such frankness what could Alfred Latimer do? From inexperience of the world he was somewhat gullible, and slightly so also by natural character. Nevertheless, at the present moment, his own finances were beginning to get somewhat lower than he liked to see them, and he therefore answered, "I can understand that, for to say the truth, Tankerville, I am somewhat short of cash myself, and sha'n't be sorry to hear that you have come to pay me the fifty pounds again."

This was a way of putting the matter, which Captain Tankerville was not altogether unprepared for, for he was a grand calculator of contingencies, and he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with every discoverable fact concerning Mr. Latimer's family, circumstances, and situation.

"Why, not exactly that, Latimer," he replied. "I've come to pay you back part, and part is better than none, you know. I can let you have twenty pounds, for I have just made a grand *coup*, and as

soon as I got any of the dust I thought of you. Here 's the money ; but I can do better than that for you—if you 'll just listen to a little advice of mine I think I can put you in the way of setting yourself up completely ; but then, you know, you must let me have a share of the advantage.”

“Let us hear what the business is,” said Alfred Latimer. “You shall have your share if it can be carried through, and I 'd give a devil of a deal just now to be able to command a thousand pounds.”

“You can get more than that if you manage right — ay, five times as much,” was Captain Tankerville's answer ; “the matter will be easily done, for it wants but one bold stroke, which in your case would be attended with no danger, to make your fortune completely.”

“Well, out with it,” said Alfred Latimer ; “I'm ready for anything that may do that. What is to be done ?”

“Something I wonder you have not done long ago,” answered Tankerville. “You know we had a talk some time ago about your sort of half sister, Miss Charlton — that is to say, your mother's second husband's daughter.”

“That is not my half sister, you know,” exclaimed Alfred Latimer. “We are no more relatives than you and I are ; but what next ?”

“At all events she has a large fortune,” said Captain Tankerville. “You can drive your own

bargain with any man who wants to marry her. If one won't pay down another will."

"That won't do," replied Alfred Latimer. "I have no power over her."

"But you may readily get it," said Tankerville, in a low voice.

"I might have got it at one time, if I had thought of it before," answered his companion; "but that chance is gone too, now. She is engaged, I am sure, to Morton, and with my mother's consent, too, or she would never have told him all her affairs."

"Do you know what this Morton is?" asked Captain Tankerville; "the people of Mallington do not seem to know anything about him."

"My mother thinks he is a poor painter," answered Latimer; "but I am sure he is not that."

"Are you sure he is not worse?" demanded Captain Tankerville; "there are strange suspicions about him in the village. I was talking only last night to a good lady of the name of Martin, who told me many doubts she had, and very reasonable doubts, too. Now listen to me, Latimer—you've a great regard for Louisa, and you've every right in the world to interfere, in order to prevent her marrying a man whom you have reason to think a swindler."

"But I've no reason to think any such thing," exclaimed Latimer; "quite the contrary. I'm

sure he's a man of fortune. Ah! I see what you mean," he continued, observing a peculiar grin upon Captain Tankerville's countenance,—“you would say I can pretend to think he's a swindler; but he could prove the contrary in five minutes, and then I must hold my tongue.”

“Not if you will do as I would have you,” said his companion. “You don't suppose I wish you to go to Mallington and tell your mother and the old guardian—I forget what is his name—that you think Mr. Morton not a proper marriage for Miss Charlton, and all that. No, no; that would never do. You must first get her into your power—into your own hands—then drive your bargain with him; and if there be any row about the matter, you've always got a good reason to give for what you have done. You can say that you had reason to believe he was an impostor; that your mother and the old guardian were, for their own ends, furthering the trick; and that you had taken her away only to make her a ward in chancery. But there will be no row. He will come down with the dust fast enough when he finds you have got her in your own hands, and that there may be a great deal of difficulty in getting her out again.”

“I don't think it,” answered Alfred Latimer; “when I talked to him about my mother's making him pay for her consent, and showed him that it was well worth his while to do so, he replied, as proud as a peer, that he would never have any

share in making Louisa's hand 'a matter of merchandise.'"

"Ay! that's another affair," replied the Captain; "he'll be all the more likely to give five or six thousand pounds to get her away from you, especially if you keep it close where she is. He'll not call that a matter of merchandise. That will be merely setting her free."

"There's something in that," said Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but I don't know how it is, I don't like to vex Louisa. She's a good kind girl as ever lived."

"But you must tell her and everybody else the same story," rejoined Captain Tankerville, who internally laughed at the few remaining scruples in Alfred Latimer's heart. "You must make them all think that you wish her nothing but good, and you can easily do so, for there are plenty of causes for believing this Mr. Morton to be a very doubtful sort of person."

Alfred Latimer shook his head, and laughed, answering,—“You can't make me credit that.”

“What will you think,” said Captain Tankerville, after a momentary pause for consideration, “when I tell you that there are bills posted upon all the walls round London, offering a reward of fifty pounds for the apprehension of a certain clerk, lately in the employment of Mr. Quatterly, solicitor, who has absconded with a large sum of money, and is supposed to be concealed in the country under a false name? Now you may very

well choose to believe that this Mr. Morton is that very clerk. You know that Morton and Quatterly had money matters with each other, and there are many suspicious circumstances about this fellow's stay at Mallington. All this can be proved, and no one can say that you didn't believe the whole of it, so you are perfectly safe, if you choose to take Louisa from Mallington House to-morrow."

"It's not a bad scheme," answered Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but how am I to get her away?"

"That's easily done," answered Captain Tankerville. "I'll manage that for you."

Just at that moment a slight noise was heard in the next room; and Alfred Latimer suddenly held up his hand to Captain Tankerville, and then, opening the door between the two chambers, looked in. Lucy was seated near the window, employing herself with some woman's work, and her scissors lay upon the floor beside her, as if they had fallen from her lap. Alfred Latimer closed the door again, but did not resume the conversation there, beckoning his companion to follow him to the garden.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE first house in the town where Alfred Latimer had taken up his abode as one come from London had a tall wooden post before the door, with a square iron frame at the top, in which had formerly swung a sign; but that sign had long given way to wind and weather, and the present occupant had contented himself with painting up in large letters over the door, "The King's Arms." To whatever king those arms might have belonged they had certainly dignified no very important public-house, though over the door it was written that good beds might be found within. In this house there was a small parlour, which had not known the beautifying touch of either painter's or whitewasher's brush for several generations. The brownish yellow colour, too, which is acquired by age, had been deepened and heightened by the fumes of many thousand tobacco pipes; and the odour of the narcotic weed, rendered somewhat flat and strong by its antiquity, still exhaled

from the panneling and from every article of furniture which the place contained.

The room had but one tenant, a man of about thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, who, in spite of being respectably dressed, had a look of misery about him difficult to describe. It was not alone that his well-cut and not very old coat had evidently not been brushed for several days, nor that the legs of his trousers displayed spots of mud up the back ; but it was the attitude in which he sat, and the expression of his countenance which gave one the idea of utter wretchedness—deep, internal, consuming.

There was a handful of fire in the grate, and he had drawn his chair to the side of it, resting his right foot upon the fender. His fore arm lay negligently on his thigh, his head drooped till it was within a foot of his knee, his shoulders were drawn forward till they almost touched his ears, the form of the bladebones being apparent through the coat behind ; and he gazed upon the small glimmering fire, as it wavered and flickered before him, with a dull and leaden eye, in which there was no comfort. Never was there a picture of more complete dejection ; and if it wanted aught to render it more striking, the finishing touch was given by the glass half full of gin and water, which stood upon the table beside him. He had drunk a part in the vain endeavour to raise his spirits, but even in the midst had plunged into the reverie of his sorrow, and forgotten to finish

the draught. What was that sorrow? The worst that can afflict humanity—crime.

The door opened with a pulley and weight; and the moment he heard the clatter that it made, he started with a look of terror and turned round. It was Captain Tankerville who entered, and in him the poor man recognised a tormentor, but not what he most dreaded—an officer; and, with an impatient jerk of the shoulder, he betook him to gaze into the fire again, at the same time raising the glass with a nervous shaking of the hand, and drinking off the contents.

“Ah, Mr. Wilkins,” said the worthy captain, as he entered, “still poring and pondering, and making yourself miserable. If you go on this way you will get caught to a dead certainty.”

“Do not call me Wilkins,” answered the man, in a piteous tone, “I told you that my name is Jones. What do you want now? You promised to go away, and not to come near me again.”

“Ay, I intended to do so,” replied Captain Tankerville; “but I am compelled to trouble you, as the tradesmen say, Mr. Wilkins—I mean Jones. A little occurrence has just taken place which makes it absolutely necessary that I should have two hundred pounds more.”

“Two hundred pounds!” exclaimed the unhappy man, “where am I to get it?”

“That won’t do, my good sir!” replied the captain, “I’m up to all that. The sum you took

off old Quatterly's desk was eleven hundred pounds, and"—

"Hush, hush!" cried the culprit, for Tankerville had purposely raised his voice; "do not speak so loud. You know I gave you all the gold I had—one hundred and ninety pounds—and you said you would not take notes for fear they should be stopped."

"Well, they must do now, for want of better," answered the captain; "but I must have two hundred somehow, that's clear."

"And then you will come back and want more," rejoined the clerk, almost fiercely, "till you get the whole, and I shall be punished for your profit."

"Oh, no!" cried his tormentor, "that's a mistake. This is the last, positively; but it must be had, Mr. Wilkins, *alias* Jones. No, I am sorry for you, and don't wish to trouble you; nay, more, I'll put you upon a plan of getting safe out of the country as soon as you bring the money."

"Will you?" cried the unhappy man, eagerly. "How is it—what's to be done?"

"Get the money first, and then I'll tell you," replied Captain Tankerville.

"But won't you cheat me," replied the man, "after you've got the money?"

"See what it is to be a cheat," said the worthy captain, in the true Richard the Third style. "He fancies every one as great a rogue as himself."

The fraudulent clerk did not certainly look quite satisfied, but went out of the room, muttering something to himself. Captain Tankerville was not inclined to put more confidence in the clerk than the clerk was in Captain Tankerville, and recollecting that it was quite possible for Mr. Wilkins to quit the house, he walked out into the passage, and planted himself at the foot of the stairs. He received no interruption in his watch but from the landlord, who inquired, "Are you pleased to want anything, sir?"

"A glass of brandy-and-water," replied the captain, who was always ready, "Cold without;" and leaning his arm upon the bar, he chatted for a moment till Mr. Wilkins appeared coming down the stairs. The unfortunate man had never entertained the slightest idea of escaping from his persecutor; and giving Tankerville a sign to follow, he walked into the little parlour again. As soon as they had entered, he produced a bundle of notes, which he handed over to Captain Tankerville, exclaiming, "Now tell me, tell me what is to be done?"

But Captain Tankerville had his particular taste as well as other men. He enjoyed the unhappy culprit's anxiety; it was a pleasant amusement to him. He therefore counted over the notes slowly, and then, looking up with a dry cold countenance as he put them into his pocket, he said, "Suppose I have nothing to tell."

"You 're not such a villain," said the clerk.

“Why, you see, Mr. Wilkins, *alias* Jones,” said Captain Tankerville, “it was not very fortunate for you, certainly, that you should stumble upon one who knew you so well; but, if you ask my advice, now—the best thing you can do is to make your way to a sea-port, and take your berth in a ship. That ’s the only way to get out of an island.”

The poor man gazed upon him for a moment, with a look almost bewildered; but then a glance of rage came into his eyes, he lifted his head, threw back his shoulders, and rising from his seat strode towards the door.

“Hallo! what are you going to do?” exclaimed Captain Tankerville, somewhat disconcerted by these signs of an intention which he did not rightly comprehend.

“I ’ll tell you,” said Wilkins—“I see what you ’re about. You intend to wring the last shilling out of me, and then inform against me for the reward; but I ’ll be beforehand with you; and, what I am going to do, is to call the landlord, give myself up to him, and accuse you as an accessory with the money upon you—I won’t be tortured this way any longer;” and he stretched out his hand towards the lock.

“Pooh, nonsense! I was only joking,” cried Captain Tankerville, a good deal alarmed in his turn. “Come back—come back, and I ’ll tell you what to do.”

He rose as he spoke; but Wilkins had by this

time gained the courage and decision of despair ; and he replied, " Sit where you are, and I 'll stay here till you tell me, for I 'll have no more joking, when you 've got my neck in a halter, and I 've got your feet in Botany Bay."

Now, it is probable that Captain Tankerville, if he had not given twenty pounds of the stolen money to Alfred Latimer, might have ventured to call loudly for the landlord, to have given Wilkins in charge, and to have pretended that he had only taken the sum which he had about him in order to prove the man's guilt. But that was out of the question, and after a moment's consideration, he said, " What a fool you are not to see when a man is joking with you. Here have I not only been laying out a scheme for you, but have actually got the means of carrying it into execution. Look here, and he pulled out of his coat pocket a bundle of handbills, each of which contained a full, true, and particular account of Mr. Wilkins's personal appearance, and offered a reward for his apprehension.

" What has that to do with my escape?" said Wilkins fiercely, when he saw them.

" Everything," replied Captain Tankerville ; " I bought these of a man who was sticking them up, expressly for your sake. Now, what you have got to do is this—go to a slopseller's, and buy yourself a flannel jacket and an apron, get yourself a tin pot full of paste and a paste brush, and walk away towards the nearest port you can find,

sticking up a bill upon the wall wherever you may think there are people looking after you. They are never likely to suspect a man who is seen placarding a reward for his own apprehension. It's a new go that, my good fellow, and I think a devilish clever one;" and he laughed at his own cunning. "I'll tell you what I'd do besides," he continued, getting into the spirit of the thing—"I'd cut off that dark hair and those whiskers, buy myself a second-hand flaxen wig, and a low-crowned glazed hat. Then the devil himself wouldn't know you."

A ray of the bright light of hope shone in the culprit's eyes, and he said, "That will do—I do believe that would do. Well, this is kind of you after all; but I don't know rightly which road to take."

"Oh! I'll tell you," answered Captain Tankerville; "you've only to walk along the London-road for a mile, and just beyond the milestone you'll find it branch off to the right; that will lead you over the hills to Mallington."

"I can't go there," cried Wilkins; "that's where I was ordered to go the very morning I took the money."

"That's just the reason why you should go," answered Tankerville; "they'll never think to find you there. You might lodge there for a year without ever being found. It really makes me sick to see a fellow like you in such a fright. But do as I tell you, and all will go right. The

first thing you do when you go into Mallington, stick up a bill against the wall of the great house at the top of the hill. Then plant another on the garden wall of the Bagpipes Inn, down by the bridge ; then you can take the coach that comes down at night, and get on to Winchester, and so to Southampton."

"I'll set about it directly," said Wilkins, raising his hand to the lock of the door ; but then he paused, while his face became a shade paler, and he added, "You won't inform against me, after all?"

"Why, you fool, I should be cutting my own throat," replied Captain Tankerville. "Should not I have to give up all I've got? Besides, I've another object in getting you safe out of the country. What it is, is no business of yours ; but it will serve my purpose, and that is enough. So go along and buy the things, pack them up in a bundle, and change your clothes at the first common or wood you come to. I'll keep the landlord chatting here till you've done it all."

"I must get a five pound note changed," said Wilkins, remembering his assertion that he had given Captain Tankerville all the gold he had taken, though such was not absolutely the fact ; and after remaining at the inn till Wilkins returned from making his purchases, Captain Tankerville saw him pay his bill, and went with him a short distance on his road to Mallington.

CHAPTER XX.

THE fact of a lawyer's clerk having robbed his master was not a matter of so much horror and importance as to give great gratification to the general public of Mallington, when the very man who had committed the crime, dressed as a bill-sticker, placarded the walls with an advertisement of reward for his apprehension. Had they known the trick, indeed, which was being played under their eyes, it might have made them more comfortable, but as it was, though a great number of persons read the handbill, yet the great majority very soon forgot the affair altogether. There were two or three persons in Mallington, however, for whom it opened sources of enjoyment unknown to their fellow-townsmen. Miss Mathilda Martin read the placard as she went down the hill; and although she was on the way to speak with Mrs. Splashman—the gay widow of a draper, who was looking forward to future matrimony—in regard to nine pair of silk stockings, which she had never paid, yet she instantly turned back to the shop

and communicated to her sister the important intelligence. As soon as she had told the story, Miss Mathilda shut her mouth, opened her eyes, elevated her eyebrows, and shook her head, with mystery as clearly written upon her countenance as ever it was upon that of a certain Babylonian lady of more than doubtful reputation.

The meaning of the look, however, was not hidden from Miss Martin herself. She saw the inference at once, and replied without hesitation, "There can't be the slightest doubt of it. Now, Matty, it is but a public duty to call the attention of Soames to the subject. I wouldn't say anything direct; that isn't your business; but I'd just point out to him the bill, and then ask him if he does not think it very extraordinary that there should be such a likeness between this clerk, Wilkins, and the person calling himself Morton. I'd have another look before I went, and get all the particulars."

"Oh! I've got them all as pat as the ten commandments," replied Miss Mathilda Martin. "'Five foot ten or eleven inches high, dark complexion, dark hair and whiskers, rather good-looking'—I don't think him good-looking, for my part—'generally dresses himself in black, and has somewhat of a military look'—there can't be a doubt of the man, I think."

"Not enough to puzzle a child," replied Miss Martin, "and when you put that and that together, and think of his being down here and nobody

knowing who he is, and his walking out at nights, and all that, the thing is clear as clarify."

"Well, I'll go directly," cried Mathilda, and turned out of the shop upon her charitable errand. As she went down the street, however, to her great satisfaction, she found Mr. Soames himself, with his eyes raised up towards the wall, reading the important document, with Mr. Gibbs, the traveller, and one or two other persons standing beside him. Miss Martin suffered him to conclude, and then touching him with her delicate hand, she called his attention to herself, and begged to speak with him for a moment.

Mr. Soames walked aside with her somewhat unwillingly, for he knew Miss Martin to be a dangerous person, and one in whose hands anything that was said increased and multiplied and shot out branches in various directions with rapidity and fecundity truly astonishing. Miss Mathilda Martin, however, had the talent of insinuation, and she seldom began straightforward; thus her first question was "Have you apprehended him?"

"Who do you mean?" asked Mr. Soames, in a rough tone, desirous of making her speak more plainly.

"Why, the gentleman to be sure," replied Miss Mathilda Martin, looking shrewdly over her shoulder towards Mallington House.

"Do you mean the man that the bill is about?" asked the constable, pointing to the placard; and,

as Mathilda nodded her head, he added, "How could I apprehend him when I've never seen him?"

"La!" cried Miss Mathilda. "Well, I never! I thought you must have seen him often enough. 'Five foot ten or eleven, dark hair and whiskers, rather good-looking, usually dressed in black—has somewhat of a military look!' Well, there's nobody so blind as those that won't see, and if people don't choose to use their eyes and understanding, I can't help it; but I know what, if I were a constable, I should look after those as are down here, with no business or calling, giving themselves great airs, and spending a great deal of money, when no one knows where it comes from."

As she said this, Miss Martin turned away, and the constable, beckoning Mr. Gibbs, walked up the village. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Gibbs," he said, "even such a foolish old maid as that Miss Martin has her suspicions."

"Oh, hang her!" said Gibbs, "she suspects everybody. I offered them the agency of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad for the town and district of Mallington, and they immediately—"

"Well, but," said Harry Soames, interrupting him, "you acknowledge yourself that you have seen strange things, and yet you won't say what they are."

"Because I can't help thinking there must be some mistake," answered Gibbs. "He's a perfect

gentleman, and I've had papers of his in my hand which make me quite sure of it."

"That might be all a trick," answered Harry Soames. "How can you tell they were his papers? If he be this scamp of a clerk, as I think, it's just as likely that he has taken some of his master's papers as the money, and then he would be sure to use them just to cover who he really is. I've a good mind to go and take him up, and bring him before a magistrate on suspicion, that I have—"

"You might get yourself into a mess," said Mr. Gibbs; "and I'd wait till I saw clearer, if I were you. It's a very doubtful case, Mr. Soames—a very doubtful case, indeed. It puzzles me quite; I don't know what to make of it."

"Well, if you would tell me all," rejoined Soames, "perhaps I might help you out with it. What I want to know is, what put you in such a flusteration, and made you look so knowing the day after they attempted to break into the hall. If I take this young fellow up, depend upon it I'll call you before the magistrates to give evidence; then you'll be obliged to speak, you know, so you might as well say your say at once."

Mr. Gibbs still hesitated, however, and even in the end would not give the required explanation, but urged Harry Soames only the more eagerly to take care he didn't get into a scrape. The constable continued to press him in various ways as they walked up the hill. "I almost thought," said Soames, "at one time, that you fancied

this Mr. Morton had a hand in the job up there."

But Mr. Gibbs parried the point dexterously. "Oh dear!" he said, "how could I think that? Wasn't he down himself the next day with Dr. Western, looking all about the place where they had broken in, and advising Edmonds to sleep in the house, almost as if he were giving him orders?"

"That might be all a trick, too," answered Soames. "Your cunning fellows know how to push a face. Well, at all events, there's Wilkinson, Mrs. Charlton's servant, at the gate; and I shall just talk a word or two to him about this young chap. If I could but get up some story, I would go in and speak to the fellow myself. I'll answer for it I'd soon fish out something from it."

Mr. Gibbs shook his head, doubting very much Mr. Soames's power of fishing anything out of Mr. Morton; but, having a certain degree of curiosity about him, he was willing to help the constable in this part of his undertaking, and suggested that Master Harry Soames might pretend to have something to say upon the subject of his lost pocket-book. This proved a very satisfactory hint to the constable, and walking on together, they approached the footman who was standing at the gate.

To Harry Soames's question, however, as to whether Mr. Morton was within, the man replied in the negative; and the constable proceeded, in

a quiet conversational tone, to talk of that gentleman, and his affairs; to the course of which proceeding Mr. Wilkinson opposed no impediment, having his full share of footman qualities, amongst which neither the least, nor the least frequent is that of chattering about that which does not concern one. The palaver which ensued would not be very interesting to the reader, if given in detail, but Mr. Soames and Mr. Gibbs gathered from their friend that the proceedings of Mr. Morton were matter of some wonder and speculation in the servants' hall—that he was often out very early in the morning, and often late at night; and that, moreover, everybody in the house but Mrs. Windsor wondered what their mistress could be about.

“I can't help saying he's quite a gentleman, certainly,” said Wilkinson, “and does everything in gentlemanly style; but if I were a mother, Mr. Soames—which, please God, I am not likely to be—I should like to know who he is, what he is, and all about him, before I made him my daughter's husband. Mrs. Windsor understands it all, I can see—hang it, she understands everything. She's one of those still, quiet, peeping, cat-walking people who knows every mouse-hole about a house; but she won't say a word, not she.”

“Well, Mr. Wilkinson,” said the constable, “I wish, when Mr. Morton comes home, you'd just contrive to step down and tell me, for I want to speak to him about this pocket-book of his. I

think I could contrive to get it for him if I had a little more information."

The footman promised to follow these instructions; but we must now turn to give some account of what had taken place at Mallington House at an earlier hour of the same morning.

CHAPTER XXI.

AMONGST all the pleasant things of life—and the all-bountiful hand of Providence has scattered the path of our days with innumerable pleasant things, if man would but enjoy them—amongst all the pleasant things of life, there are few more pleasant than a walk in a flower-garden before breakfast on a sunshiny morning. To see those mute and still, though not motionless creatures—I mean the blossoms—opening their painted bosoms to the beneficent rays which give them their colour and their loveliness, welcoming the calm blessing of the light as if with gratitude, and seeking, in their tranquil state of being, for nothing but the good gifts of God, might well afford a monitory lesson—for everything in nature has its homily—to us, the eager hunters after fictitious enjoyment. How calm do they stand in their loveliness—how placid in their limited fruition of the elements that nourish them—how in their splendid raiment do they sparkle in the sun—how do they drink up the cup of the dew, and gratefully give back honey and

perfume in return! And there are some, though but too few, who, watching them as I have said in the morning light, can gather such lessons from their fair book, and feel their hearts lifted up to God even by the contemplation of a flower. One of those who could do so was Louisa Charlton, and it had always been her custom from her childhood, when the sun shone, to go down as soon as she was dressed and walk for some time through the gardens round the house. They were large, and carefully tended, for they had been the pride of Mr. Charlton's heart, and he had loved to see his flowers the finest, and his fruits the best that the country could produce. After his death, Louisa took the chief care of them upon herself, for to the mind of the daughter the memory of her father was associated with every different flower-bed, and tree, and shrub.

On the day of which we have been speaking in the last chapter, namely, that on which the inhabitants of Mallington, on rising from their beds, found the placard describing the absconded clerk, which had been posted up the day before—Louisa Charlton entered the garden about a quarter before eight, with an air less calm and tranquil than usual. She came down the steps, with her light foot treading the ground eagerly, and her face turned alternately to every different part of the garden, evidently looking for some one in haste. At length some object, beyond the second row of evergreens, attracted her up the middle walk, and in less than

a minute her hand was clasped in Morton's as he advanced to meet her.

"Oh, Edmond!" she exclaimed, "I am glad I have found you. The butler said you had gone out; and, as you mentioned last night that you had some engagement to-day respecting the pocket-book, I feared that you might be already away."

"What is the matter, dear girl?" asked Morton, with some feelings of apprehension. "You seem agitated. Has anything alarmed you?"

"No, I am not exactly alarmed," replied Louisa, "but a little annoyed by a note I have received this morning from Alfred. He says," she continued, holding an open letter for her lover to read—"he says I am not to tell any one, and especially neither Mrs. Charlton nor you; but I think that, as we are circumstanced"—and the blood rose slightly in her cheek—"I have no right to keep anything back from you, whoever may ask it. In this case especially, I cannot do so, for how I shall act will depend entirely upon what you say."

Morton took the note gravely, for there was something in the very name of Alfred Latimer that conjured up thoughts of no very pleasant character; and read it through before he replied. The words he saw were to the following effect:—

"DEAR LOUISA,

"I am very awkwardly situated, and much want your advice and assistance. I cannot come into Mallington to see you, for reasons; but if you

would just, like a kind good girl, as you always are, walk out through the garden upon the common, and take your way towards the windmill, about half-past eight to-morrow, I will meet you there, and you can be back time enough for breakfast. It will be doing me a great favour, indeed, if you come ; but mind, don't say a word to my mother, and although Morton's a very good fellow, you must not say anything to him.

“Your affectionate brother,

“ALFRED LATIMER.

“P.S. Mind, not a word to Morton, for the world.”

Morton gave the letter back to Louisa, and then drew her arm through his, saying, in a decided but kindly tone, “You must not go, dear girl, on any consideration.”

“I thought such would be your opinion,” answered Miss Charlton ; “and, indeed, after what I have vaguely heard of Alfred's late conduct, I felt no inclination to go.”

“Were Latimer a mere wild careless youth,” replied Morton, “who got himself into difficulties by thoughtlessness or folly, I might have hesitated what to advise you ; but as, on the contrary, he is habitually depraved—as he has shown no regard for honesty, honour, or even common decency,—I must be harsh, Louisa, for the occasion requires it,—I cannot but say it would be both improper and dangerous for you to meet him in the way he

suggests. What may be his design or object I know not, but I doubt much that it is one at all honourable to himself; and if he retained any sense of what is right, he would not make such a request as this."

"I do not think he meant ill there," answered Louisa, somewhat sadly; "you know that we have been brought up together as brother and sister, and he might not see any impropriety in asking me to meet him on the common, if he wished, as I doubt not he does, to obtain some assistance from me, or through my means. It is his conduct to others that has made me hesitate."

"And it is that conduct, dearest Louisa," replied Morton, "which renders it wrong in him to ask you to come, conscious as he must be of acts committed in this very neighbourhood of the most shameless description."

"And yet, Morton," said his fair companion, "I would give much to be enabled to make one more effort to recall him to better things—to give him some assistance, to extricate him from his present situation, and to—to press him—"

Louisa paused and coloured, for she was now approaching a subject that, to a mind like hers, was painful and agitating. After a moment's hesitation, however, she went on. "I would give much," she said, "to have an opportunity of pressing him to marry that poor girl Lucy. I have often seen her, Edmond, often spoke to her, and I am sure she is at least modest, good, and

virtuous. I cannot but think that some base means must have been employed towards her, and I would fain urge Mr. Latimer to remove that stain at least from his character."

Morton laid his hand upon the soft and fair one that rested on his arm. "Ever kind and noble!" he said: "I fear that it will be vain, Louisa; but yet such feelings and such wishes must not be thwarted. For you to meet him is impossible; but as this letter shows that he can be at no great distance, I will endeavour to find him out and—"

"Oh! do not risk a quarrel with him," cried Louisa; "you know not how violent and impetuous he can be; and I much fear if you were to speak with him on the subject I have mentioned, he would become furious."

"I do not propose to do so, dear one," replied Morton; "my voice would have no effect. I have abandoned all hope of reclaiming him; but yet—and I do not think that it is love which makes me fancy so—I cannot but believe that your voice might have some effect. There is something in the pleading of a woman for a woman, in the virtuous and the high for the sinful and the fallen which is very powerful. What I will then do, my Louisa, is to seek him out, to avoid all matter of discussion between him and myself, and to make some arrangement by which he may come here in safety—perhaps to-morrow morning, before Mrs. Charlton is up, and speak to you in private. You

can then hear what he has to say, and shape your arguments accordingly."

Louisa hesitated ere she replied, for she could not banish all apprehension from her mind of some painful collision between her lover and Mrs. Charlton's son; and before she suffered Morton to leave her upon the errand on which he was about to set out, she sought to take securities from him in the shape of many promises, that nothing should induce him to suffer Alfred Latimer to irritate or make him angry. Morton tranquillized her upon that point, assuring her that her fears were without cause, and then left her to proceed upon his way, having received the day before an intimation, that if he would come to a spot named, some communication would be made to him in regard to the lost pocket-book, which might prove more satisfactory than the last.

Issuing out of the gate farthest from the house, Morton directed his steps towards the point assigned, which was marked by a red-painted finger-post upon the common, about two miles and a half from Mallington House. He had no very distinct notion of the locality, for he had never hitherto had occasion to visit that side of the common. The attentive reader, indeed, would probably be able to find his way to it blindfold, were he told that the post stood about three hundred yards to the south of the lone house, to which Prior, the Bow-street officer, had been conducted some time before by Bill Maltby. As Mr. Morton, however,

had not heard anything but the result of Prior's expedition, it is not to be wondered at that he wandered somewhat out of the way. Thus bearing to the eastward of the direct line, at the distance of about a mile from Mallington House, he came in sight of the mill which had been mentioned in Alfred Latimer's letter, and he naturally turned his eyes in that direction. At a little distance from the mill he perceived a man pacing up and down the road; and though he could not be nearer than half a mile, he had no difficulty in recognising the person of Mrs. Charlton's son. As it was not his intention to encounter him at that moment, and he did not like to have the appearance of spying upon him, Morton turned off to the right, and, passing over the brow of one of the numerous waves of ground, descended into a hollow filled with gorse and heath, through the midst of which wound the little narrow path he was following. That path soon led him over another slope, from which he caught sight once more of the top of the windmill, and in a minute or two after he descended into a still more profound hollow, which, like a great furrow formed by some gigantic plough, extended straight across the moor for nearly a mile. On the left, in the direction of the mill, which was now no longer visible to Morton's eyes, and at the distance of about three quarters of a mile from the path which he was pursuing, the highway crossed the dell, and, looking along the hollow vista in that

direction, the top and body of a post-chaise as far down as the axles of the wheels, with the heads and shoulders of three or four men gathered together in a group, were apparent. The chaise was motionless; the men did not stir; and Morton thought the whole circumstance somewhat odd and suspicious. He calculated that the spot where the vehicle was placed must be about a quarter of a mile from the mill, and upon considering the undulations of the ground, he became convinced that neither the chaise itself, nor the people who accompanied it, could be visible from the spot, where Alfred Latimer was waiting for Louisa Charlton.

A quick suspicion passed through his mind; but Morton was not fond of suspicion, and although he knew that it was difficult to do Alfred Latimer injustice in such circumstances, he mentally said, "No; he could never be such a scoundrel!"

Twice or thrice, as he passed over the opposite slope, he turned his eyes towards the chaise, and still saw the same group at the same spot. Just when he reached the top, he perceived the figure he had seen waiting near the mill, coming along the road above, towards the party below, and apparently beckoning to one or more of them. Satisfied, however, that Louisa was in safety, Morton walked on, and the minute after they were hidden from his sight.

As he advanced he got a better and more general view of the country round, and perceiving that he must have gone too far to the eastward, he

took the first path to the right, which soon led him to a small sandy carriage road; and at the end of about half a mile farther he perceived the red post to which he had been directed, standing before him, with part of the lone house which Prior had visited, appearing above some trees beyond. No person was seen upon the road, however, and Morton, thinking that he might have been delayed beyond the appointed time, took out his watch to ascertain the hour. He had yet ten minutes to spare, and walking on to the finger-post, he sauntered up and down before it; but still no one appeared. Nor, indeed, had it ever been the intention of the person who called him there to come or send, the appointment being made, as the reader may have divined, merely for the purpose of keeping Mr. Morton in play. That gentleman at length began to suspect that such was the case, and was about to turn upon his way homeward, when the sound of carriage wheels suddenly met his ear, coming on apparently at a rapid rate.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE plan was all laid out, the preparations made, half a dozen lies were ready to be told as soon as any circumstance might require them, the post-chaise was concealed in the hollow, and, besides two or three of Alfred Latimer's usual companions, Captain Tankerville, dressed in a suit of black, to look as like a physician as possible, stood by the vehicle, to give authority to the tale which had been devised. The post-boy had been brought from a house at which Alfred Latimer was not known, and he had been told that the object of all this care and plotting was to catch a poor maniac who was in the habit of wandering upon the common, and who was to be confined in an asylum under a medical certificate. The same tale was to be spread wherever any questions were asked; and the document, authorizing restraint to be used, had been manufactured by Captain Tankerville, who was an adept in concocting false papers to suit his purposes. Everything, also, had

been prepared at the cottage inhabited by Alfred Latimer: a room had been furnished with nailed windows and iron bars; and the landlord had received intimation that it was the intention of his tenant to bring thither, for a short time, a near relation of his own, who was, unhappily, insane. The good gardener took the story upon trust; and Latimer, never doubting that Louisa would come at his invitation, thought Tankerville a very clever fellow for devising such a plan.

"I do not see," he said, "why I should not get a part of the money as well as my mother, if Louisa is to be set up to auction;" and he proceeded to calculate how many pleasant things he could do with five or six thousand pounds.

He was early to the spot appointed, and, when Morton passed, had been waiting nearly an hour, though the time he himself had fixed had not long gone by. As he was watching for Louisa coming, he caught sight of Morton, though that gentleman was not exactly upon the road by which he expected her to appear. At first he did not recognise him; but in a moment or two there was something in the air and figure which showed him who it was: the firm and vigorous step, the upright and commanding carriage left not a doubt; and, on the first impulse, Alfred Latimer would have hurried behind the mill to hide himself. The next instant, however, he thought "She has told him, I'll bet a guinea; and he's coming here to spy. He had better mind his own business, or

he'll get his bones broken. Perhaps she has sent him to palaver me about virtue and propriety, and all that, and to offer me money if I'll be a good boy;" and he laughed scornfully, adding, "Hang me if I get out of his way."

Thus saying, he recommenced his walk again; but he very soon perceived that, whatever was Morton's object in coming to the common at all, he had no intention of approaching the spot where he had stationed himself. He concluded that Louisa's lover had come to watch and to find out his designs, and the consciousness of his own villainous purpose made him fancy it already in part discovered. "Curse it!" he exclaimed; "if he goes on in that direction he will see the chaise and all the people. Perhaps he may have other fellows to help him, sent round behind by the lanes and the bank. I had better go and talk to Tankerville about it;" and off he set as hard as he could go, beckoning to his companions as soon as he got upon the brow of the hill, and calling them to come to him, in order that the post-boy might not overhear their consultations.

The first who approached was Captain Tankerville, and Alfred Latimer was in full career communicating to him his doubts and suspicions in regard to Morton, when Bill Maltby joined them. The latter caught enough of what was said to perceive the fears which the young gentleman entertained of being surprised, and he hastened to relieve him, saying, "Pooh! nonsense, sir. I

knew quite well he was going across the common at this time."

"What is he after, then?" asked Alfred Latimer, turning quickly towards him. "What business has he up here at this time?"

The question somewhat puzzled Bill Maltby, for though he had willingly enough agreed to take part in Alfred Latimer's present enterprise, and had himself found a boy to carry the note to Miss Charlton, he was not at all disposed to trust that gentleman with any knowledge of the adventures in which he and Williams had been engaged.

"What he's about is no great matter," replied Maltby, at length. "He's gone upon a fool's errand, and will have to cool his heels for an hour at the Red post, by Gandy's old house, waiting for 'the man that never comes.' The truth is, he's been making a fuss about this pocket-book of his, and had down Prior from London; so a party of us young fellows determined that we'd have some fun out of it, and make the gentleman walk the country."

"If that's the case," said Captain Tankerville, "you had better go back, Latimer. But it must be past the hour. I shouldn't wonder if she didn't come."

"If she doesn't," replied Latimer, "that d—d fellow has stopped her."

"Why I can't help saying he's very right," replied Tankerville, laughing; "and yet we might make him pay for it, too."

"I wish we could," replied Alfred Latimer. "I am sure he has stopped her, if she is stopped, for she would only show the letter to him; and I'd give a guinea to see his head broke for his pains."

"Perhaps we can do better than that," replied Captain Tankerville; "but do you run up again, Latimer, and see if the girl's coming. I'll think of another plan in the mean time."

His companion returned to watch by the mill, and Tankerville held a brief conversation with Bill Maltby, in which they spoke quick, and ekeed out their words with nods and signs. We must, however, content ourself with such scraps and bits of sentences as met the ear of an inferior companion, young Blackmore, the gardener's son, who had been engaged by Maltby to assist that morning, but was not admitted to the full confidence of the superior vagabonds with whom he was confederated.

"Oh, no," answered Maltby, to a question from Captain Tankerville, "he knows nothing of me, though I know him."

"Well, then, if we can't have the doe, we must take the buck," replied Tankerville. Then followed some murmuring, at the end of which the captain observed aloud, "Oh, no; I heard all. He did not say whether it was a man or a woman—not a word of it. He only said a maniac."

"But I do not see the use of it," said Maltby. "What can you do with him?"

"I 've not settled all," replied Captain Tankerville, in a tone of philosophic meditation. "One can never quite foresee all the results of anything; but one must be a great fool if one cannot find some way of turning them to advantage. At all events, if this young lady is so much in love as Latimer says, we shall find means of driving a bargain with her when we have got her lover safe in our hands."

"Well, you had better be quick," rejoined Maltby, "for he will not wait very long, and, besides, he 'll show fight, you may be sure, and then, if there should be any one near, we may get into a mess."

"You run up and call back Latimer," replied Tankerville, "and in the mean while I will instruct this young fellow—what is his name?"

"John Blackmore," answered the other, in a whisper; "he 's a determined little devil, though he looks spooney and lackadaisical," and having given this excellent character to his friend, he set off to recall Alfred Latimer.

On his return a brief but earnest conference was held by the four respectable persons engaged in this very praiseworthy enterprise, and though Latimer, when he rejoined his companions, bore a dark fierce look upon his countenance, he soon was seen to smile with a bitter sort of satisfaction at what Tankerville proposed regarding Morton; for your thorough scoundrel is incapable of gratitude, and, transmuted by the dark alchemy of

his own heart, benefits conferred upon him become injuries. There was something in the whole scheme that he liked—it had its portion of imagination and enterprise, and, as to scruples, Alfred Latimer had done with them.

“You must drive us round by this road, and then take the second to the right till I tell you to stop,” said Latimer to the postboy. The man touched his hat, and the young gentleman added, “The poor man we are looking for has gone across the common.”

“Aye, sir, I see him go just over there five minutes ago,” answered the other. “I should not wonder if he were to dodge you uncommon.”

Latimer, Tankerville, and Maltby then got into the chaise, John Blackmore mounted the splinter bar, and round they drove till they came within about a couple of hundred yards of the spot where Morton was waiting. There, leaving the chaise in the hollow, while John Blackmore, instructed what he was to say, advanced along the road to engage the object of their scheme in conversation, the other three crept through the shrubs and tall furze towards the same spot.

The gardener's son came up with Mr. Morton just as he was about to turn towards Mallington, and, addressing him with an easy air, he said, “I beg pardon for keeping you so long, sir; but there were people with a chaise dodging about, and I did not know what they might be after.”

“Then you have come to speak about the return

of my pocket book?" replied Morton. "I hope, to accept the offer I made, for this will be the last opportunity you will have of doing so."

"Cannot we split the difference, sir?" said young Blackmore, advancing closer to Morton, as if to whisper. "I think, now, you ought to consider—and if you do not you must."

Thus saying he threw himself upon him; but Morton, stepping back, with one straightforward blow, levelled him with the ground. The youth, however, cast his arms round his opponent's feet and legs as he fell, and in an instant the three other men were upon him. The struggle that ensued was firm but brief, for Morton's chief effort was to draw a pistol from his coat pocket, having taking the precaution of arming himself before he set out upon an expedition which might not be without its peril, but the attack was so sudden that his arms were speedily pinioned; and as soon as he found the attempt to reach the weapon vain, he ceased to resist, merely saying, as his eye rested upon Mrs. Charlton's son, "I know not what are your designs, sir; but you had better consider well what you are about, before you plunge into crimes as well as vices."

Alfred Latimer made no reply but by a triumphant laugh, and they hurried their captive on towards the chaise. As soon as the post-boy was within hearing, however, Morton exclaimed, "Are you, my man, too, an accessory to this act of violence?"

“ Ah, poor gentleman, I know all about it !” answered the man ; and before Captain Tankerville could stop him, he added, “ You ’re not the first madman I ’ve druv.”

“ Ha ! is that the story ?” exclaimed Morton ; “ then let me tell you, you are cheated ; and if you do not inform the nearest magistrate of all you have seen, you will certainly suffer for your part in this affair. I shall know you and your master ;” and he read aloud the name upon the door of the chaise.

Morton resisted the efforts made to force him on till he had said what he thought necessary, and then quietly entered the vehicle. Captain Tankerville and Alfred Latimer took their seats on either side of him, Maltby got upon the splinter bar, and young Blackmore, having received a whispered message from the latter, and some money from Mr. Latimer, hurried away across the common.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It took about three hours and a half for the chaise to carry Morton and his captors from Mallington Common to the house in the garden. After quitting the common, the road traversed several little hamlets, but no large village, and then gradually ascending, it ran along the ridge of a bare hilly spine, used principally as a sheep walk by the neighbouring farmers. At the other end, again, it entered into a more fully inhabited tract. A gentleman's house was to be seen here and there rising on the side of a hill; and one or two small villages echoed to the sound of the wheels, as the chaise whirled through them, but as the road was now almost all the way down-hill, the post-boy kept his horses at a good pace, and it was not till they were within about a mile and a half of the town that any pause took place. It was by this time half-past twelve—an unpleasant hour for any one to bring a cargo of contraband merchandise through the market-place of a large town—and, consequently, Alfred Latimer put his

head out of the front window, and directed the post-boy to drive round by the lanes, adding something about "the poor gentleman making a row."

Morton merely smiled; and though he saw a man coming along the road he made no movement of any kind, being one of those calm people who only take advantage of the proper opportunity more resolutely, because they have waited for it with patience. His perfect tranquillity, indeed, was not altogether pleasant, either to Alfred Latimer or to Captain Tankerville. They could not account for it themselves upon any other reason than that he had a perfect certainty in his own mind of speedy deliverance, by some process which they could not divine; and they began to entertain those vague apprehensions of dangers, against which there is no guarding, but which are very unpleasant to men engaged in a criminal pursuit. The post-boy having received his orders, drove round the town, through the lanes, and reached the cottage in the garden, the wall of which had in it, besides the ordinary door, a gate for the gardeners' carts to enter and go forth. At this gate Maltby jumped down, and drew back the bolt, giving admission to the vehicle, which instantly rolled on close up to the door of the house. He then planted himself on one of the steps, and Alfred Latimer sprang to the other, to prevent the captive of their bow and spear from holding any communication with the master

of the house, who was seen at a little distance working in his garden. Morton, however, alighted quite quietly, as if going straight into the house, but he turned suddenly to the post-boy, who was looking round, and exclaimed, "Remember what I told you! You will be well rewarded if you do — punished if you do not," and then walked on, followed by Tankerville and Latimer, while Maltby remained at the door to watch the proceedings of the driver.

As soon as Mr. Morton was safely deposited in the room which had been prepared for Louisa Charlton, and the door locked and bolted upon him, the two principal scoundrels who had brought him thither, held a whispered consultation in regard to what was to be done with the post-boy.

"By —! he's devilish like to go and tell a magistrate," said Alfred Latimer; "the fellow will say to himself there can be no harm in that, whether the man is mad or not."

"Ay, that's what our friend up stairs calculated upon," rejoined the worthy captain; "and there's but one way of mending it."

"And what's that?" demanded Mr. Latimer. "I don't see how we can stop it."

"Why give the boy a five-pound note for his trouble," answered Tankerville; "then if he keeps the money he's art and part in the business, and won't dare to say a word; and if he says a word he'll be obliged to give up the money, which, depend upon it, he won't like to do."

Alfred Latimer did not at all approve of lessening his little stock by the sum of five pounds; but, nevertheless, he saw no help for it; and after some grumbling, he advanced to the door of the house, paid for the horses, and gave the post-boy the sum determined upon, saying, "That 's for your own trouble. You need not mind anything that fellow said about telling magistrates. He 's as mad as a March hare, and we 've got a doctor's order. Here it is."

The man only thanked him, and drove out of the gate again; but as he went he exchanged a glance with the good gardener; and raising his right thumb towards the left ear of the off horse, seemed to indicate a desire that the man should follow whither he was about to go. The gardener, advancing to shut the gates, looked out, and nodded his head, as if to signify that he understood and would follow.

In the mean time the three respectable gentlemen who had been engaged in this pleasant affair, proceeded to the drawing-room of the cottage, whence poor Lucy Edmonds was speedily dislodged to give freedom to their consultation. As soon as she was gone, Tankerville exclaimed, slapping Latimer on the shoulder, "Now, my boy! at him at once. You have got the game in your own hands, if you play it well."

"But let us consider what I'm to say," rejoined Alfred Latimer.

"Oh! don't stand any nonsense," answered

Tankerville. "Treat it as a matter of business, Latimer. Tell him you know quite well he prevented Miss Charlton from coming, and so he must stand in her place. Just say to him that if he has a mind to give you a promise in writing to lay down five thousand pounds to you on his marriage with Louisa, and to pledge his word of honour that he will not mention anything about this affair to any one, you 'll let him out at once, but if he doesn't you 'll keep him in till you settle the matter with Louisa herself."

"He 'll refuse to a certainty," replied Alfred Latimer; "I know him better than you do."

"Well, it can't be helped, if he does," answered Tankerville. "We 'll settle the matter with the young lady. It's always a devil of a deal easier to plough with the heifer. We must get her promise for the five thousand—I 'll manage all that. The devil of it is, we must be quick, otherwise you see inquiries will be made, and the whole business may get blown, which would be awkward. However, we are sure of three or four days, and I 'll answer for bringing the young lady round in that time. You go and speak to him Latimer; and Mr. Maltby and I will wait at the door, to make sure he doesn't break your head and get out, for he 's devilish strong when he likes it."

Alfred Latimer, according to this suggestion, moved up stairs, followed by his two worthy comrades, to the room in which Morton had been

placed. At the door, however, he paused for an instant; for when his blood was not up, there was a sufficient degree of shame left to make him feel unwilling to go in and display to an honourable man the whole meanness and baseness of his character. He did not choose, however, to shrink or hesitate before his two more impudent companions; and, after this momentary pause, he threw open the door sharply and went in, with his brow knit into a frown.

Morton was standing at the window, looking out; but he turned round instantly, catching sight before the door was closed, not only of Alfred Latimer himself, but of his two companions. His visitor, however, determined to take the first word; and, without giving Morton time to speak, he said, with a swagger, "I can tell you what, sir, people who think that they can thwart me when I've determined on a thing, will find that they may get into the wrong box. You may say what you like, but I know quite well, Louisa was fool enough to show you my letter, and that you told her not to come; you now taste the consequences."

Morton gazed at him with a look of pity, not unmingled with contempt, "I do not understand," he replied, "what you mean by telling me that I may say what I like. I am not accustomed, sir, to say anything but that which is true."

"Well, did you, or did you not, tell her not to come?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, eager to find grounds of quarrel.

"I undoubtedly did," replied Morton, "and I am exceedingly glad that my opinion of your character was so strongly formed, that I advised her not to trust herself with you at a distance from home, even before I knew you would venture to such a length as to gather together three or four ruffians and swindlers, with a post-chaise, in order to carry her away to a room freshly prepared, with iron bars to the windows, for her imprisonment under some pretence or another."

Latimer had twice opened his lips to interrupt Morton while he spoke; but, to say truth, he was puzzled for a reply, and rage did not facilitate his utterance.

"I have every right," he exclaimed, at length, "to take any means I may think fit to prevent my sister from marrying a fortune-hunter and a swindler."

Morton smiled, but answered calmly, "You have no right, sir, to interfere even in the slightest degree. Fortunately for herself, and for all who have any regard for her, you are not any relation whatever to the lady whom you presume to call your sister. Her guardians and her step-mother will, doubtless, take good care that she does not, as you say, marry either a fortune-hunter or a swindler; and if it is to me you apply those terms, there is nobody who should know better than yourself that you are falsifying the truth, and attempting to cover a piece of knavery by a lie."

Had Tankerville or any other of his companions

ventured to use such expressions, Alfred Latimer's first act would have been to knock him down, but there was something in Morton which cowed him; and, after hesitating for an instant, he replied, "I did not say you were a fortune-hunter or a swindler; but I do say I've a right to know who you are, before you marry Louisa Charlton, who, if she is not my sister, is just as good."

"You have no right at all," replied Morton. "To those who have a right to inquire, I have explained already."

"The devil you have!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. "Then, I suppose, you mean to say you've made your bargain with my mother?"

"I've made no bargain with any one," answered Morton; "nor shall I make one—of that you may be quite sure; and I cannot but hope and believe that you mistake your mother's character in attributing such objects to her."

"Pooh, nonsense!" replied Alfred Latimer. "My mother would be a fool if, when old Charlton put such power in her hands, she did not make the most of it. What did the old man do it for, if he did not intend her to gain something by it?"

"It was very strange, certainly," answered Morton, thoughtfully; "but there is no accounting for old men's caprices; and it is my belief that the law will not sustain that part of the will."

"The deuce it is!" exclaimed Latimer, "then the more need I should take care of myself; and I've only one word to say, Mr. Morton, which is

this—if you or Louisa do not agree to pay me down five thousand pounds upon your marriage-day; and if you do not give me your word of honour that no notice shall be taken of this affair; you will have to kick your heels here for a month or two.”

“In regard to my taking notice of your present conduct,” replied Morton, “probably I shall not punish you as you deserve; not on your account, but on Miss Charlton’s. In regard to her conduct to you, or to what she may think fit to promise you, I have no control; but for my own part, as I said before, I enter into no bargain with you or any one else; and allow me to say that, by attempting to make such, you only degrade yourself without in the slightest degree forwarding your own object.”

Alfred Latimer set his teeth hard, and then replied, “I’ll tell you what, sir—I’ve got the whip hand of you, for a time at least—and I’ll make you forward my object, whether you like it or not,” and thus saying he flung out of the room, and joined his two companions on the outside.

“Well done, Latimer!” said the gallant captain, grasping him by the arm. “We heard it all, and nobody could do it better. But come, let us consult on the next step,” and, going down to the room below, Captain Tankerville continued, for he had already laid out the whole plan in his own head. “You must make me your ambassador to this fair queen of beauty and wealth,” he said. “I will go

over early to-morrow and represent the case to her; and I doubt not, before dinner time I shall bring you over her promise under hand and seal. Those dear creatures, the women, they are so easily humbugged, especially where a lover is in the case! Then, they are always inclined to do things with an air; and but set them riding upon the hobby of generosity, and there 's no knowing how far they will go."

"It 's not so with all women," answered Alfred Latimer, thinking of his mother.

"Wouldn't it be better for you, captain, to go over at once?" asked Bill Maltby. "It 's better to strike while the iron 's hot."

"No, no," replied Captain Tankerville; "give her a day to fret. They 'll not be able to trace him—don't be afraid; and what between trying to find him out all this morning, and fancying he 's murdered all night, she 'll be brought down so low by to-morrow that she 'll be ready to do anything that one wants, merely for the assurance that he 's alive and well."

"That 's Louisa, all over," answered Alfred Latimer. "I don't a bit doubt that she 'll promise; but I 'll tell you how you can make it quite sure, Tankerville. If you just make her think that Morton wishes it, she 'll do it in a minute."

"Not a bad idea," answered Captain Tankerville; "we might write a letter for him, asking her to do it."

"It will be better not to put anything on

paper," said Maltby, who had a fear of forgery. "Captain Tankerville can just quietly hint that Mr. Morton wishes it; but wouldn't for the world ask her. But you see, the mischief of it is, that while we are all over here, we can none of us tell what may be going on at Mallington, and a thousand things may happen to make it devilish awkward when we come to operations to-morrow."

This very sage observation produced a discussion as to the steps to be taken, which ended in Maltby setting out for the purpose of hiring a horse and gig to proceed to Mallington, to watch all that took place in that village, and give due intimation of any occurrence that might be important to his two companions.

After he was gone Captain Tankerville coolly invited himself to dine and spend the evening with his dear acquaintance of the sponging-house; and poor Lucy Edmonds was forced to endure during the rest of the day the presence and society of a man whose countenance and manners filled her with instinctive dread. After dinner Latimer and his companion both drank deep, and Lucy was glad to quit them, and retire nominally to rest, though but little rest indeed could the unhappy girl find. The drinking still went on in the room that she left, and then cards were produced to pass away the time, for Captain Tankerville could not resist the temptation to pigeon even a confederate in crime; and Alfred Latimer, who really did play well—it was his

only talent—fancied that he played better than any one else. For several games success was pretty equal on both sides ; and though Latimer did not wish to risk money, as the whole of the twenty pounds he had received from Captain Tankerville had been well nigh dissipated in the operations of that morning, the stakes were gradually increased till they mounted high, when fortune's balance began immediately to incline in favour of Captain Tankerville. With a heated brow and a glittering eye Latimer went on ; but he still lost, and began to fancy he was cheated. The pile of money grew up on Tankerville's side of the table, and diminished upon his, till he saw immediate need stare him in the face. Yet he could not stop, but went on watching the game with fierce eagerness, and thinking that he saw a card kept back, or slipped beneath when the pack was cut. He was in hopes at the very next deal of detecting the fraud, when the bell of the house was heard to ring. The door was not opened, however, and with scarcely a minute's interval the bell rang again.

“The old fellow below is asleep,” said Tankerville. “I should not wonder if it is some one from Mallington. I'll go and see,” but before he did so he swept up his winnings, and put them in his pocket. Then, taking the candle, he walked down stairs.

Alfred Latimer listened, and heard the voice of John Blackmore, the gardener's son ; then looked

with a haggard eye at the small sum that remained upon the table—less than ten pounds; but that was all that he now possessed on earth; and the next moment Tankerville and the messenger entered the room, with an expression of a good deal of anxiety in the countenance of the former.

CHAPTER XXIV.

To explain this event, I must return for a moment to another and apparently an insignificant personage. Just at the turning of the lane, which took an elbow before it entered the high road, the post-boy stopped his horses—for we must now go back to the worthy gentleman in white corduroys, top boots, and a red jacket, who had driven Alfred Latimer and his friends to and from the neighbourhood of Mallington. There are many varieties, indeed, of the post-boy genus: the loquacious, the taciturn, the observing, the stolid, the drunken, the grave, the smart, the slow, the impassable, the picturesque, and the poetical; but we will not be led into a disquisition upon post-boys, and merely say that, of all these varieties, the post-boy in question belonged to the observing class. A mind naturally astute, rendered quicker by a considerable quantity of drubbing in infancy and boyhood; the habit of lounging about inn doors and examining all sorts of things that passed; the necessity

of driving multitudes of people whom he did not know, and of gathering from various little traits whether they would give threepence, fourpence, or fivepence a mile ; and the custom of riding and tending every devil of a horse that his master chose to purchase ; all these rendered him of an observing disposition, and enabled him to judge rapidly of everything he saw.

Having stopped his horses, then, which were somewhat hot and very tired, he got out of the saddle, and turning round looked behind him, to see if Alfred Latimer's landlord was coming. He had to wait several minutes before the worthy gardener made his appearance, plodding up the lane, and, after a significant glance between him and the post-boy, the conversation began as follows :—

“This is a rum go, Master Wilson,” said the man of horses.

“Ay ! I don't half know what to make of it,” rejoined the man of flowers.

“Do you know much about that young chap as is lodging with you ?” asked the post-boy.

“No ; I know nothing at all,” replied the gardener, “except that he pays his rent. That's my business, and I never mind anything else.”

“That 's a hint,” said the post-boy, “that I had better mind my business, too ;—but I can't help thinking, Master Wilson, that 'ere young gentleman they 've got hold on is no more mad nor you or I.”

"Can't say," replied the gardener, drily; "never see him before."

"Did you hear what he said to me?" inquired the other.

"No; I heard him say something, but not what it was," answered the gardener. "The truth is, I don't want to meddle with what doesn't concern me, and so"—

"As you get your rent, and I dare say it's a good one," rejoined he of the post-chaise, with a grin, "you'd rather that your lodger wasn't disturbed in his doings. Well, it's no concern of mine either; so I'll jog on," and thereupon he put his foot in the stirrup, and trotted away to the inn.

The post-boy was now left to his own resources, cut off from the expected counsel of the gardener, and much doubting what he ought to do. The five-pound note which he had in his breeches pocket had a snug and comfortable feeling about it, which it would have been unpleasant to part with; and yet, strange to say, the very fact of his having received that five-pound note caused the greatest doubt as to whether he should keep it. He knew that it had not been given him for nothing; and he had to consider that, if any disagreeable consequences arose from the detention of the gentleman reported to be insane, he was sure to be looked upon as art and part in the transaction, in consequence of his having received so large a sum without a rightful claim. Besides all

this, he was at heart not at all an ill-disposed or dishonest person. He had, also, that which almost every Englishman naturally possesses, from the highest-minded man of honour to the lowest scamp—a great dislike to injustice in the abstract; and, moreover, that which all Englishmen habitually receive—an abhorrence of any infringement of civil liberty.

But then the five-pound note in his pocket felt so comfortable; and the devil, who is always at every man's elbow, ready to take advantage of any little circumstance in his fate to lead him away from the straight path by the most persuasive arguments, kept pointing out to him how many nice things he could buy, and how many pleasant things he could do, with the sum of one hundred shillings. Honesty and prudence required him to resign it: the devil and convenience said, keep it snug; and, between them, poor human nature was in a sad puzzle.

The internal emotions of the man will have in some way their external impression. Our poor post-boy displayed the embarrassment in which he was by various visible signs. He rubbed down his horses ten times more than was needful—he broke out into an agitated whistle in the midst of his brushing. The ostler asked him where he had been so long, and he answered, "Yes—very;" and when he came to give the landlord the money for the horses, he had well nigh given him the five pound note into the bargain. Still he could settle

the matter in no degree to his satisfaction. He wished the devil would not tempt him, but the devil would; and the bundles of hay were so equally divided, that, like the ass in the fable, he could move on neither the one side nor the other, so completely was his mind on the balance.

At length something occurred to relieve him. A gentleman's chariot drove up to the door of the inn, and a loud voice shouted up the yard, "Horses on!"

Now the inn possessed three pair of posters, and at that particular time but two post-boys—little crooked-legged Jemmy, whose right leg had somehow been bent into the form of a semi-circle, apparently by the pole, being laid up with a severe fit of illness.—The ostler called aloud, "Tom! Tom!—horses on!"

"Where's Bill?" cried Tom, which was our friend's christian name.

"Gone to Winkington," answered the ostler. "Quick, Tom; the gemman's in a hurry, and you must go."

Now Tom, as the reader knows, had ridden forty-two miles that day, and he might be well pleased with a little repose; but there was no remedy for his case, and, carrying his great-coat over his arm, he issued forth to the inn door, where the ostler was already busy in putting to the horses. The first thing he saw, on giving a glance in at the carriage-window, was an immense head, which had apparently seen many summers;

but the expression of the countenance thereunto appertaining he could not well discover, for, in addition to the impediment of a pair of spectacles, the eyes were cast down, busily reading what seemed to be a law paper. The landlord was making out the ticket, but Tom, with a view to further discoveries, thought fit to approach the window and inquire, "Where to, sir?"

The gentleman looked up, and replied, "To Mallington. How far is it?"

"One and twenty miles good, sir," replied Tom, in a desponding tone, as if he thought he should never get there that night.

His dolorous expression seemed to strike the gentleman, and he replied, "I hope the man in the moon has not come down too soon to find his way to Norwich, for I should like very much to be in Mallington before eight."

Tom promised to do his best, received the ticket, got into the saddle, and drove away, still cogitating upon what he was to do. The journey, however, passed over quietly enough. The horses were fresh—a great deal fresher than Tom—but he himself was moved by that sort of irritating doubt which is a great incentive to locomotion; and so he kept his beasts going at a good rate till, a little after nightfall, they entered Mallington, and drove up to the door of the Bagpipes. Mrs. Pluckrose was out in a minute, the ostler made his appearance, the chamber-maid was seen in the background, and two or three heads raised themselves

over the blinds of the tap and the commercial-room. In the mean time Mr. Quatterly entered the inn, and was ushered up stairs; the horses were taken off, and Tom, the post-boy, thinking he had earned a right to a little repose, went into the tap, seated himself with his whip in his hand, and called for a pint of beer to begin with. While the barmaid was drawing it for him, he suddenly heard the voice of Mrs. Pluckrose replying to her new guest on the first landing, "I'll send the note immediately, sir; but I'm afraid it's no use, for Mr. Morton, as I hear, went out early this morning from Mallington House, and hasn't yet returned, and they are all in a great fuss about him. There have been people out all over the country looking for him; but when last I heard he had not been found."

This speech of the landlady made a deep impression upon Tom, and on the impulse of the moment he exclaimed aloud, without noticing the presence of a slang-looking young man, who was flirting with the barmaid through the window, "Hang me! if that isn't the gentleman they are talking of as I druv over this morning. I'll go and tell them all about it;" and up he got, with his whip still in his hand, and approached the foot of the stairs.

"No," said Mr. Quatterly, speaking to Mrs. Pluckrose, still at the first landing, "I'll go myself, ma'am, and inquire into this business. Let me have somebody to show me the way." But

just at that moment Tom appeared, touching his hat, and saying—

“I think I can tell you more about it nor any one, sir, for I knows more nor any one.”

“Come up, then—come up,” said Mr. Quatterly, quickly. “Though this business seems as dark as mutton-pie, we’ll soon have some light in it.”

The moment after, Tom, Mrs. Pluckrose, and Mr. Quatterly were all shut in together in consultation, and, in about five minutes, the voice of the landlady was heard calling from above,—“Betsy!—Betsy! Send the boy down to Dr. Western to say we’ve heard where Mr. Morton is gone to, and beg him to step up directly. Tell the ostler to get out a chaise directly—make the boy run all the way.”

The slang-looking gentleman, of whom we have spoken, had paused in his conversation with the barmaid to listen to what was taking place above; and when the voice of Mrs. Pluckrose was heard giving the above orders, he walked hastily out of the inn, and hurried down a lane at the back of the street to a small public-house, which we may say, by the way, bore not the very best reputation in Mallington. He there found, seated, our respectable friends Bill Maltby and Mr. Williams, to whom he communicated all that had just taken place at the inn.

“Get out the horse, like the devil!” was Maltby’s first exclamation; and as soon as the lad had run

to perform this errand, he and Williams held a short whispered consultation, at the end of which a piece of paper was procured, on which the latter gentleman wrote a few hasty lines. In a minute after the youth returned, saying the horse was out. The note was intrusted to him; and he received directions to "ride like hell!" which we may naturally conclude meant as quick as he could go.

CHAPTER XXV.

As may well be supposed, the news which reached Captain Tankerville and Alfred Latimer, to the effect that their whole proceedings were made known, and that magistrates and lawyers were in pursuit of them, proved by no means palatable to those worthy gentlemen. After about five minutes' conference, however, Captain Tankerville made up his mind as to his own course.

"Well, Latimer," he said, "I don't know what you intend to do; but I'm off; so good-night."

Latimer looked at him with a stern and haggard eye, but, for a moment, made no answer. At length, however, a smile of scorn, somewhat strained and unnatural, came upon his face; and he said, "You are easily frightened, Tankerville, and, I dare say, will be afraid to come back and give me my revenge when these fellows are gone. You have left me but a hundred pounds in the

house ; and you ought to give me my revenge at least—if your heart does not fail you.”

He spoke an untruth when he pretended to possess the sum he stated ; but it was not without an object, as he well knew the only sure bait he could hold out to the swindler before him was money.

Captain Tankerville rose at it like a hungry trout. “Oh dear, no !” he said—“I’ll not baulk you. I’ll come back as soon as I find the coast clear ; but I doubt, my friend, that if you stay, you’ll get nabbed, for what we have done is no joke.”

“I can get bail, if I want it,” replied his companion, in a cool tone ; “but as you cannot, I fancy, you had better go. I shall expect you to breakfast at ten ; and I’ll bet you five pounds that I keep my man in spite of them.”

“Done !” answered Captain Tankerville ; and, with a renewed promise to return and give him his revenge, as men term the process by which they propose to plunder a dupe still further, he took his departure, and left Latimer and young Blackmore together.

As soon as he was gone the note was examined once more with keen attention, and then Mr. Latimer inquired, “How will Williams get over, John ?”

“In the gig, sir,” replied the gardener’s son. “He has been showing himself a good deal in Mallington lately, just to prove to the folks that

he had nothing to do with cracking the window at the hall, but he always keeps a gig ready, nevertheless; and if he tells you in the note that he's coming, he'll be over quick enough, for Jack Williams does not lose time. He did not say anything to me about it, however."

"Then you had better go where you were told," answered the young gentleman. "I cannot spare much, but there's five shillings to bait the horse, and you shall have more by-and-by."

He spoke in a calm, ordinary tone; but when he was once more alone that apparent tranquillity deserted him, and he walked up and down the room for half an hour in a state of agitation approaching despair. Again and again he looked at the small sum upon the table, and murmured, "What shall I do?" and then recommenced his walk with a quick and irregular step. There was an ear that heard it all, and a heart that more than shared his anguish, though without being able to conceive the circumstances, vague hints of which showed her that he was suffering and in peril. Lucy Edmonds would have given worlds to have gone in and consoled him; but she had learned to fear him, too, and dared not venture, and while she was still listening to the hurried footfall, she heard the sound of wheels. Then a window was thrown open, and Latimer's voice, speaking to some one over the garden-wall, inquired, "Is that you, Williams?"

Another voice answered in the affirmative, and

then she caught the sound of Latimer's foot descending the stairs. The door below was opened, and then there was a pause of some minutes, after which two persons ascended to the adjoining room, and voices were heard again.

Lucy listened eagerly—not from curiosity, but from deep interest. She only heard part, however; but that part was sufficient to cause very mingled emotions. Once the light of joy rose up in her heart, and more than once terror, and anxiety, and grief, took possession of her. Her lip now bore a smile—faint, indeed, although it was the smile of hope; but then again she trembled as she lay, and, turning her face to the pillow, wept. To explain the cause of such emotions, we must relate the conversation that took place in the other room; but, at the same time, it must be remembered that it was but a part, and that a small part, which Lucy Edmonds overheard, otherwise the slight gleam of hope and happiness that came upon her would have been drowned out at once in the flood of anguish.

Williams entered the room with a slow step, and, without seating himself, stood on one side of the table, where Captain Tankerville had been placed, while Latimer remained upon the other. “I looked for you all along the road,” he said, “thinking that the news might have scared you.”

“If you had not come soon, I should have gone after John Blackmore, and waited for you there,” replied Latimer.

"I called as I came by," said Williams. "I must have got the start of them in setting out, by full half an hour; and those two spavined carcasses that Mrs. Pluckrose calls post-horses will be a pretty time upon the road, I'll answer for it. So we shall have time to talk a bit before there is any danger; and I want to say a word to you."

"Well, say away," answered Alfred Latimer, "only remember Lucy is in there;" and he pointed with his thumb to the door of the bedroom.

"Are you married yet?" asked Williams, aloud.

"No," answered Alfred Latimer; "not yet."

"Then I sha'n't say anything at all," answered Williams; "for you promised her, and you promised me, and how can I trust the man who breaks his word so?"

"How the devil could I keep it sooner?" replied Latimer. "The banns have been published twice, and to-morrow's the third time — I intend to marry her the next day."

"Will you really?" asked Williams. "You seem devilish lukewarm about it."

Alfred Latimer called down vengeance on his head, with a fearful imprecation, if he did not fulfil his word on the day after the next; and then added, "I'm not lukewarm at all about it — I'm more determined than ever; for I've devilish little to share with her but my name, and that she may as well have as soon as possible. But what

has all this to do with what you were going to say?"

"Why, a good deal," answered Jack Williams; "for I intend to be off for Zante on Monday, and you may come too, if you like. But you sha'n't come unless Lucy goes as your wife. There's a ship lying ready to sail in the Downs, which will take us all for a trifle; and when we are there, we can follow out what we are talking of, you know."

Alfred Latimer was silent; and he gazed upon the table with bitter mortification, as he thought that the state of poverty to which he had reduced himself, would prevent him from executing the wild and criminal but exciting scheme upon which he had been meditating for the last month. Williams looked at him with a thoughtful face, seeing clearly that there was some impediment which made Alfred Latimer hesitate.

"Come," he said, at length, "if you are thinking of this other scheme you have in hand, it's all no use, Maltby told me all about it; and as soon as I heard of it I wondered how you could be such a fool as to be taken in by a pitiful, cowardly vermin, like that Tankerville, to try anything of the sort. He's not brave enough to do anything bold and manly; and you'll soon have all the magistrates upon you for your pains."

"As to the magistrates," replied Latimer, "I don't care a pin, for they can but say that I got hold of this fellow Morton to prevent Louisa Charlton from marrying a swindler."

“Swindler!” said Williams, with a low laugh; “you know better than that; but, however, you must keep out of the way, for if they get hold of you, it may prevent you from lending a hand to one scheme or the other. If you would take my advice, you’d just open the door, and let him out, and then come along with me.”

“I should like to keep him in as long as I can,” replied Alfred Latimer; “for as sure as he gets out he will have the constables after me, and very likely take away Lucy, too, before we are married. A thousand things may prevent the people from Mallington coming as soon as we fancy.”

“There’s some truth in that,” replied his companion; “but, at all events, you had better go with me; keep yourself out of the way till it’s blown over; come back, and marry Lucy on Monday morning; and then let us be off over the wild sea to a country where there’s plenty to be done, and where we may lead a life of pleasure and activity, instead of hanging on here, where man is always flogged back into a particular path by laws and customs that he hates, like one out of a pack of hounds.”

Alfred Latimer shook his head sadly. “I can’t, Williams,” he said; “I can’t. That fellow Tankerville has cheated me out of almost everything I had. That’s all he’s left me,” and he pointed to the seven or eight guineas that lay upon the table.

“That’s bad,” said Williams, looking at the

money with a grim smile. "I knew what would come of it, as soon as I heard you had anything to do with that fellow again. But come, sir, there's nothing without its remedy; and what I've got to talk to you about will be a remedy for this, if you've got the courage and determination I think you have. Though I am pretty well off in pocket for a single adventure, yet I haven't got enough for what I want. We must strike a good stroke, before we go, that may set us off well; and I know where such a blow is to be struck."

Alfred Latimer raised his fingers, and pointed to the next room; and Williams proceeded in a lower tone. "I was disappointed," he said, "when I first tried this job; but I sha'n't be disappointed a second time, for I have got a key made to the little door that goes into the stable-yard, and there are no bolts upon it. We should only have to get over the wall, and walk quietly in, shut up the women, quietly to pack up what we want, and be off. Maltby had such a fright last time that we won't have him, though we must give him something to be quiet; but I only intend to have two with me, and, if you like, you may be one."

"Where is it?" demanded Latimer, in a whisper. "Is it Mallington Hall?"

Williams nodded his head, and both remained silent, while Latimer first gazed down upon the ground, and then turned his eyes with a look of bitter inquiry to the small sum of money upon the

table. At length his brow contracted ; he set his teeth fast, and muttered between them, with a nod of the head, " I will go."

" That 's right," said Williams. " There is certainly to the worth of five or six thousand pounds, and perhaps more."

" When is it to be?" asked his young companion, eagerly.

" To-morrow night," replied Williams; " but you had better come with me to-night. All this job about Mr. Morton will make a good blind for your being absent. Then you can come back early on Monday, marry Lucy, and be off for the sea."

Alfred Latimer agreed to all that he proposed, for his fortunes seemed desperate, and, like many another man, without waiting to see if, out of the clouds and darkness that surrounded him, some light would not break to guide patience and endurance unto brighter things, he hurried on upon the path before him, heedless of the abyss that yawned beneath his feet.

" I will come," he said, " I will come. But I must take some things with me, and speak to Lucy for a minute, to tell her that I will be back on Monday."

" She had better have everything arranged for your marriage by nine o'clock," said Williams, " for the sooner you are away the better. Write a note to the parson before you go, and bid Lucy meet you at the church with all the traps. Then you can start at once."

“I will,” replied Alfred Latimer; “and I’ll give the note to Lucy to take.”

“You had better a great deal tell her to keep herself out of the way all to-morrow morning,” answered Williams, “for you can’t tell what may happen. We’ll bid John Blackmore watch about, and let her know when the people have been here, so that she may come back afterwards.”

The note was accordingly written with all despatch, and, taking it up to carry it to Lucy, Alfred Latimer was putting his little store of money in his pocket, when Williams whispered, “Give her half of it, man — never leave a woman without money;” and, agreeing to the suggestion, the young man entered the chamber beyond, and closed the door. What was said Williams could not distinguish, but he heard a low, murmured conversation, mingled, he thought, with bitter sobs; and when Alfred Latimer returned, his face was flushed and his manner agitated.

“What’s the matter?” asked Williams.

“She fancies something,” answered Latimer, “and wanted to stop me; but it doesn’t signify. Now I am ready to go. But stay, I may as well put these in my pocket,” and taking out a brace of pistols from a cupboard, he disposed of them as he had mentioned, and followed his companion down stairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE summons of Mr. Quatterly was not long unattended to by Dr. Western, and in less than twenty minutes he walked into the inn and inquired for the gentleman who wished to see him. The meeting between him and the respectable solicitor was not as that of two strangers, although they had never seen each other before; for as soon as Mr. Quatterly announced his name, the rector shook him warmly by the hand, saying, "Very happy indeed to see you, my dear sir. But what of our young friend? Called away doubtless, on this business suddenly; but indeed he should have given some intimation of his going, for we have all been in vast alarm about him. One little heart in our village is well nigh breaking with terror; and let me tell you that heart is a treasure not to be trifled with."

"What can't be cured must be endured, my dear doctor," replied the solicitor; "Samson was a strong man, but he could not drink out of an

empty pitcher. Our friend could not give any intimation of his departure, because he did not know he was going. You have heard of the man who set out to catch a Tartar. Now, my dear doctor, our friend caught a Tartar who would not let him do anything he thought fit to do. He was not exactly in bodily fear; for I suppose he would call me out if I were to insinuate that such a thing was possible; but he was not *liber homo*."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the rector, mistaking Mr. Quatterly's meaning, and thinking that for some cause, just or unjust, Morton had been arrested, "how did this happen?—I hope no foolish quarrel—no duel? He went out early, Louisa said, and"—

"Wrong, all wrong," replied the old solicitor. "He was neither in the hands of sheriffs' officers nor of Bow-street officers—neither of the *constabularius vulgaris*, nor of the *serviens ad clavam*, or *ad arma*; but in the hands of a set of *Macegrarii*, as I may call them, or buyers and sellers of stolen flesh; they have kidnapped him, carried him off in a post-chaise, upon the pretence that he is insane, and taken him to the town of —, which I passed through about four hours ago—would I had known it then!"

"But who can have done this?" said Dr. Western; "any of the parties, think you, to this suit that is pending?"

"Not at all, not at all," replied Mr. Quatterly;

“but this young dog who, quitting his rank and station in society, chooses to associate with scamps and swindlers. Was not she a dirty slut to sell her bed and lie upon dirt?—The rhyme is not correct, but that does not matter—it is no other than young Alfred Latimer, to whom he was so kind. I told him, I told him! What’s bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh. You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. But there is the roll of wheels, and it must be the chaise I ordered, so that the best thing you and I can do is to step in, go over to —, and ensure his liberation as fast as possible. You are a magistrate, I think?”

“But not for that county,” replied Dr. Western. “Besides, my dear sir, I am not prepared for this journey. To-morrow is Sunday, and duty must, of course, be done in my church.”

“Very unfortunate, very unfortunate,” said Mr. Quatterly; “but surely you could get back in time for that, and I shall require some person to identify me as Timothy Quatterly, Esquire. At all events, you’ll come over as soon as possible to-morrow, for we may have difficulties, especially if they have taken care to get or manufacture a certificate of insanity, which seems probable, from the account of the post-boy, and who says that they showed him some sort of paper about somebody being mad.

Dr. Western was somewhat puzzled how to act. He saw, indeed, that his presence might be

absolutely necessary to Morton's immediate liberation, and yet he knew not where to find any one on the spur of the occasion to do duty for him in his church. At length, however, the worthy solicitor, broke in upon his reverie, saying, "Well, you must come to-morrow, at all events, and I will go on to-night to have all ready. I will go on with the bottle and bag, and you can come after on little jack nag. I must not forget, however, to take this post-boy with me, for I must have evidence on oath of our friend having been carried off, of the parties to the crime, and of the place to which he has been carried."

"He can be sworn before me," said Dr. Western; "it does not matter in what county he makes his deposition, provided it be properly attested."

"True, true," replied Mr. Quatterly. "We'll have him up. You shall swear him, and I'll be the clerk."

Thus saying, Mr. Quatterly rose, rolled his great body on his small legs to the door, and, going out, descended at once to the ground-floor of Mrs. Pluckrose's dwelling, where he advanced to the door of the tap-room and threw it open.

"Hie! you sir," cried Mr. Quatterly, as his eye instantly rested on the post-boy. "Be so good as to come up stairs;" and he went on to mutter to himself, not venturing to say it aloud, for fear of confounding the man's comprehension, "Up-stairs, down-stairs, in my lady's chamber."

As he did so, however, he swept over with his eye the rest of the persons assembled in the room, turning himself half round at the same time, as if to depart. Suddenly he came to a full stop, and then marched straight up to a man dressed in a jacket and apron, who sat on the other side of the room, with a pot of beer before him. If any body had taken the trouble to look at that man's countenance when Mr. Quatterly's large and remarkable head first presented itself in the tap, he would have seen a hue like that of death spread itself over his cheeks and lips. Yet, though evidently terrified at something, he seemed fascinated like the bird by the serpent, and continued gazing in the solicitor's face with a vacant and stone-like stare till Mr. Quatterly stood directly before him, saying, "Oh, ho!" with a very remarkable emphasis. Then his teeth began to chatter in his head, and though he gasped twice as if in the attempt to speak, no sounds issued forth from his unclosed jaws.

Mr. Quatterly remained the space of about a minute silent, but at length he spoke in an authoritative tone, saying, "Be so good as to get up, sir, and walk through that door, then take the turning to the left, and up stairs to the first landing. Post-boy, follow him close, and be ready to chevy in case he runs."

But the poor wretch had no such design. He rose as he was directed, moved like an automaton to the door, which the post-boy opened for him,

walked up the stairs, and there, at the top of the first landing, stood with his head bent down, his hands clasped together before him, and the same death-like hue upon his face.

“Walk in,” said Mr. Quatterly, who followed close, and, at the same time, opened the door of the sitting-room. The man obeyed; and as he entered, with Mr. Quatterly behind, Dr. Western inquired, with a glance at his habiliments, which were certainly very un-post-boyish, “Is this the man?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Mr. Quatterly. “This is the man who robbed me of upwards of a thousand pounds the other day;” and, turning quick upon the unfortunate Mr. Wilkins, he inquired, “Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?”

The man found a voice this time, but it was only to murmur in the hollow tone of despair, “Nothing,” and, while he uttered that single but expressive word of self-condemnation, he still remained with his head bowed down, and his hands hanging powerless before him.

“Nothing!” said Mr. Quatterly, who was evidently a good deal excited; “that’s a poor excuse, sir—yet, after all, it is perhaps the best you could make. Tell me, sir, was not I a kind master to you? Did I not pay you well? Were you ever kept out late at nights if I could help it? Did I ever make you sit up till morning copying old papers and investigating titles, if I could do the work myself? Did I ever refuse you a holiday

when it was possible to grant it? Did I show myself unjust—harsh—unfeeling?”

“Never, never!” replied the man, warmly. “You were all that was kind and good, and I am a fool and a scoundrel.”

“There’s some grace left,” said Mr. Quatterly, in a loud aside spoken over his shoulder to Dr. Western, and then demanded, “And pray what do you deserve, and what do you expect?”

“Punishment,” replied the man Wilkins; “though, God knows! I’ve been punished enough since.”

“Ay, the heart has been at work, has it?” said Mr. Quatterly; “but tell me, sir, was it fear or remorse that smote you?”

“Both,” replied the culprit earnestly; “fear breeding remorse. In the first place I have been tormented by that fiend Captain Tankerville. He found me out, and preyed upon me, threatening continually to give me up to justice, till he had obtained all he thought he could get. Then he sent me off in this guise on the road to the sea-coast. But here remorse came upon me, and I determined to send you back all that he had left me, except what was just enough to carry me to another land.”

“What’s that you say,” cried Mr. Quatterly, “you determined to send it back? I much fear you would have gone on nibbling, my good friend, till the cheese was all eaten up.”

“No, indeed, sir,” answered the wretched man;

"I've got the letter and the notes here in my pocket, all folded up and sealed ready to send off, and with them are the papers which I took at the same time—here they are."

"Let's see, let's see," cried Mr. Quatterly, and he took from his former clerk's hand a large lawyer-like packet, which he broke into at once, and took out a bundle of notes and papers which he looked over carefully. Then turning to the delinquent, he said, "Here are all the documents, and six hundred and eighty-five pounds. There is somewhere above four hundred pounds wanting. What have you kept for yourself? and what did you give to that fellow Tankerville?"

"I gave him three hundred and ninety pounds," replied the man; "I spent nine pounds on my way hither, and I've got five and twenty pounds in my bundle up stairs."

"You've only kept five and twenty pounds, then?" said Mr. Quatterly. "You'll swear you gave him all the rest?"

"I will," replied the clerk; "I have no more, and I spent no more."

"And positively you intended to send this letter?" continued the solicitor.

The man bowed his head, saying, "It would have gone to-night."

"What do you think of all this, eh?" demanded Mr. Quatterly, looking over his shoulder to Dr. Western, but the post-boy seemed to consider that the question was addressed to himself, for he

advanced a step or two from the door, and pulling a long lock of hair which hung down from the front of his head over his forehead, he brought his chin thereby down upon his cravat, saying, "I think, sir, as how the young man intends to make reparation; and as for that Captain Tankerville, why, Lord bless 'ee! he was one of them fellows as carried off the gentleman from the common."

"The deuce he was!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, "then the murder's out, for that fellow's up to any mischief. But are you quite sure he was one?"

"That I am, your honour," replied the post-boy, "for one of them called him captain, and t' other called him Tankerville, and them two put together makes Captain Tankerville, I think."

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but that brings us back to the point. You, boy, come hither to this table, and make a true and particular statement before this gentleman, who is a magistrate, of all that took place regarding the abduction of Mr. Morton. You, sir," he continued, turning to Mr. Wilkins, and pointing to the side of the room furthest from the window, "sit down in that corner, and don't budge a step till I tell you. I'll transport that fellow Tankerville, if there's law in the land; and shall be transported myself to do so."

"I don't know, sir, whether you know the chaise is at the door," said Mrs. Pluckrose, putting her head into the room; "but I should think, surely, you would want some supper before you go."

"I want a Bible, in the first place, madam,"

replied Mr. Quatterly; "and then supper, for I do begin to feel hungry; but do not let us be interrupted till I ring;" and all the arrangements being made, the deposition of the post-boy was taken in proper form. Dr. Western, then rising, proposed to walk up to Mallington House to relieve the apprehensions of Miss Charlton.

"Take my advice, my dear sir," said Mr. Quatterly, "talk as little about this business as possible—give no further explanations than needful. Just put the young lady's mind at rest, and say no more. You see," he continued, advancing to Dr. Western, and laying the fore-finger of his right hand upon the lapel of that gentleman's coat, "You see, my dear sir, there are various motives for caution in this matter. In the first place, it does not do to let our proceedings be known, lest the persons implicated should hop the twig, as schoolboys term it. In the next place, we are not certain what course our friend may think fit to pursue in regard to the gentry concerned in this outrage. One of them is, it appears, a very near connection of a certain fair lady; and besides, his own peculiar idiosyncrasy—which, of all the idiosyncrasies that I ever knew, is most opposed to a fuss, as I term it—would probably lead him to pass over the matter rather than to make any noise about it."

"I don't see how secrecy can be observed," said Dr. Western gravely, "as so many persons are aware of the particulars: here are these two men

now in the room, besides Mrs. Pluckrose, who has, like other ladies, a tongue not always to be restrained."

"Mrs. Pluckrose knows nothing about it," said Mr. Quatterly; "for as soon as ever I was sure the information was really coming, and I had told her to send for you, I turned her out of the room. Then, as to that man," and he pointed to his clerk, "I shall take him over with me. The other fellow in the corduroys has been already well cautioned, knows he may get into a scrape, and upon the whole seems to be a very well-disposed person, who understands that it is better to keep his breath to cool his porridge than waste it in vain gossiping. You haven't said anything to anybody yet, post-boy, have you?"

"Not a word, sir," replied the man.

"Well, then, if you take my advice," said Mr. Quatterly, "as soon as your horses are fed and rested, you'll bring them over after me, for it's as well to keep yourself out of temptation."

The post-boy promised to observe these injunctions faithfully, Dr. Western went to execute his comfortable mission to Louisa, and Mr. Quatterly called for his supper, preparatory to setting out. He seated himself, cut off a slice of the cold beef, and put a piece in his mouth—then turned his eyes to the corner, where the culprit sat as still as marble, like a statue of despair. Mr. Quatterly looked embarrassed, and felt it unpleasant to eat in the presence of so much misery. He took a

glass of wine, but that did not do any better, and he looked at the culprit again with a hesitating expression of countenance. The man had not moved an inch, and Mr. Quatterly laid down the knife and fork which he had just resumed, saying, "Come, Wilkins, draw forward your chair and take some supper."

"I cannot, sir," replied Wilkins; "I have no appetite."

"The devil you haven't!" said Mr. Quatterly; "I'm glad to hear it—it's a good sign;" and bolting a few hasty mouthfuls, he drank another glass of wine, descended the stairs, made Wilkins get into the post-chaise first, and was soon rolling away towards the town which he had quitted a few hours before.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE was a small tea party in Mallington, just such a one as that into which we have before introduced the reader. Mallington had rung all the morning with the disappearance of Mr. Morton, and the Misses Martin had derived so much comfort from the fact, that they could not help endeavouring to extract a little more from it during the evening. They whispered together with the young surgeon, shrugged their shoulders, professed that they had been perfectly sure how it would turn out, and called upon one or two of their neighbours to bear witness to the fact of their prophecies having been antecedent to the event.

“Poor Mrs. Charlton!” said Miss Mathilda, “I’m very sorry for her; but I wonder that she made such a fuss about it. It would have been better to have kept it quiet, I can’t help thinking. But how does she bear it, Mrs. Windsor? for really I am sorry for her, more sorry a great deal than for Miss Louisa, for she’s a girl of sense, and must

be glad that before matters went too far he has been found out."

"Found out!" said Mrs. Windsor. "Gone out, I suppose, you mean, Miss Martin."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mathilda, "my sister means found out. I don't know what you can call it, Mrs. Windsor, when there are bills posted up all over the place for a gentleman, and as soon as he sees them he takes himself off, but being found out for what he really is."

"And what may that be?" asked Mrs. Windsor. "I really don't know what you mean?"

"Why, I suppose there can be no doubt in the mind of anybody who has eyes, ears, and understanding; that this Mr. Morton, who has been down here is the felonious clerk that has been advertised for."

"Really I think not," replied the housekeeper of Mallington House; "and I don't at all doubt that we shall soon hear of Mr. Morton again — I hope in safety, though I have some apprehensions on that score after what happened before."

"Oh! I dare say he's skulking about in some of the woods or places," replied Miss Mathilda Martin; "very likely over at Wenlock, where he was so fond of going; but I dare say the officers will find him out."

Mrs. Windsor did not condescend to answer, but played out her rubber in silence; and about nine o'clock, or a little before, took her leave, and left the Misses Martin in possession of the field.

They triumphed wonderfully — they were eloquent — they were pathetic — they were sublime; they left nothing unsaid that could be said upon the subject of Mr. Morton, Mrs. Charlton, and Louisa; and they even touched episodically upon Dr. Western. In the mean while Mrs. Windsor walked up the hill towards Mallington House, not very slow, because she thought her mistress might want her; not very quick, because she was in a meditative mood. Now, Mrs. Windsor was endowed with a quality usually ascribed to a certain small animal with a long tail accustomed to frequent the drains and minor passages of not the newest mansions in the world, which quality is a certain inherent prescience of the approaching fall of the house. By aid of this gift the housekeeper had arrived at the conclusion that Mrs. Charlton was in a somewhat tottering condition. At the same time it appeared to her that Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton were likely to build up a dwelling of a much more stable construction, and she was strongly disposed to detach herself from the dilapidated and attach herself to the perfect house. The only consideration, indeed, was whether she was likely to succeed in the latter part of her object, but Mrs. Windsor had all her life been a very shrewd woman. She had been peculiarly kind and civil to Louisa Charlton at all times, with a degree of foresight which Mrs. Charlton herself had not possessed. She had never exactly taken the young lady's part against her mistress;

for not only would that have been dangerous as affecting Mrs. Charlton, but Mrs. Windsor had a strong notion, that the appearance of ingratitude towards a person whom she had so long served would be no passport to the favour of Louisa. She had, therefore, never blamed anything that Mrs. Charlton did — she had never opposed any of her unjust or unwise acts towards Louisa — but by a thousand little marked and kindly attentions, especially apparent at those times when the young lady was suffering under any of the mortifications inflicted on her by her step-mother, she had not only endeavoured to soothe and comfort her, but cast an implied censure upon the conduct which required such counteraction. Thus Mrs. Windsor imagined that her chance was a fair one, even as matters stood at that moment; and as she foresaw that a time was coming when a breach was likely to take place between Mrs. Charlton and her step-daughter in regard to the marriage of the latter with Mr. Morton, she thought several little pieces of information which she possessed, and which might be most serviceable to the two young people, might form a link between her and them, which would render her station in their regard quite secure. Something was necessary, however, as an excuse for deserting the interests of her mistress, and she could think of nothing better than a personal quarrel, which would put Mrs. Charlton in the wrong towards herself. She saw every probability, indeed, of such a result being

easily brought about, for Mrs. Charlton had been very irritable of late, and had vented a good deal of that irritability upon Mrs. Windsor. Mrs. Windsor had submitted hitherto in silence, because she thought it would be politic so to do, but as she calculated that a crisis was very near at hand, she now determined to submit no longer, but to retaliate in such a manner as to call forth the whole of Mrs. Charlton's spleen, without, however, putting herself in the wrong. One thing, too, she especially determined to refrain from, and that was from all allusion to her knowledge of Mrs. Charlton's secret plans for the future, or acts in the past, till the moment when it might be necessary to proclaim them aloud, for she was well aware that that excellent lady had sufficient art to govern her passions completely if she found it dangerous to display them, and to avoid anything like a quarrel with her housekeeper, if she believed it to be more for her interest to be friends with her.

With these resolutions, Mrs. Windsor rang the servants' bell at Mallington House.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Oh, doubt and uncertainty, what terrible states they are amongst the perilous things and anxious circumstances of this mortal life ! How the news of the battle fought, how the howling of the angry storm will fix the fangs of those two demons upon the heart of the mother or the wife ! — how they tear the breast of the absent for the loved afar — how they aggravate all pangs — how they mingle the bitter drop with many a cup of joy !

They were the companions of Lucy Edmonds through the livelong night after Alfred Latimer left her ; and many a dark and terrible form they took, as, with sleepless eyes, she lay and revolved the past, the present, and the future, — all sad, all cloudy, all full of frowning menace. Whither was he gone ? she asked herself. What to do ? — what new folly, what new sin, what new crime to commit ? Would he indeed return as he had said ? or was she abandoned as well as betrayed — cast off upon the hard world — homeless, defenceless,

powerless, fatherless? Her heart sunk low — low, till it hardly beat. Was it not in his character to do so? — was it not man's accustomed dealings with the weak? — were not all his actions, since she had seen them closely, evidences that he could so act? The very doubt was worse than death; yet she strove not to believe it, for she loved him still. She tried to shut out conviction of his faults and of his nature; but still she doubted, and doubt was agony.

Then came the fears for him. What would be the end of such a course as he was pursuing? — what the consequences that must sooner or later fall upon his head? All was wild uncertainty; but, like the clouds of a thunder-storm, the phantoms of the future, though vague and changing, still took a thousand dark and terrible forms. Minute after minute passed away, hour after hour went by, but every minute brought some fresh pang, every hour was consumed in bitterness and dread.

At length the day began to dawn, and the faint gray light of the autumnal morning streamed in through the half-closed curtains; but it woke no joy. Faint and sick at heart, weary, desponding, and filled with dark remorse, daylight brought no day to Lucy Edmonds's heart. Within it all was night. Still she lay and pondered for some time longer; but at length hearing sounds in the house, and remembering the injunctions laid upon her to go out early and remain absent long, she rose and

dressed herself, and walked languidly into the other room. The maid of the house was clearing the table, and the sight of the bottles and glasses and scattered cards made poor Lucy feel sick at heart. She turned away to the window, bidding the girl bring breakfast quickly.

The sight of some people in their Sunday clothes, recalled to her mind the note which had been left with her for the clergyman of the parish, and the words of assurance that Latimer had then spoken, and she seized upon them eagerly as food for half-famished hope. "Oh, yes!" she thought, "he will come back—he will keep his word;" and hurrying into the other room again she brought forth the letter, and gazed upon it with one faint ray of light breaking in upon her darkened heart.

The maid brought in the breakfast, and Lucy began to say something to her, but hesitated and then stopped. The girl was slow in laying the table, and at length, as she was just quitting the room, Lucy said, "I wish to speak with your master — presently."

The last word was added with a view to further delay, but the maid had not been gone five minutes when the landlord of the house appeared, inquiring "Did you want me, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir," said Lucy, hesitating and embarrassed. "Mr. Latimer will be out all to-day, but will be back to-morrow morning early, and he wished me to give this letter to the clergyman of the parish—Where does he live?"

The man gave her the information which she required; and then, seeing that she was embarrassed, he good-humouredly added, "I suppose it's about your marriage, ma'am. I heard the banns published for the second time last Sunday."

It was a great relief to Lucy, but yet her face turned crimson, and her heart beat terribly. "Yes," she said when she recovered breath; "it is to take place a little after nine to-morrow, and Mr. Latimer told me to ask if you would be kind enough to—to—to go with me to the church, as I have no friends here;" and overpowered at the thought that she had no friends who would own her anywhere, poor Lucy covered her eyes with her handkerchief and wept.

"Oh! that I will, madam, with pleasure," replied the gardener. "Come, come, don't take on so. Most people have to be married once, and it's not such a terrible affair, after all. I was married once myself. Shall I take the note for you?"

"No, I thank you, sir," replied Lucy, wiping her eyes; "I promised to deliver it myself."

Though she said no more, the man still remained; and Lucy, misunderstanding his object, inquired, "Did Mr. Latimer pay the rent last week?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am," replied the gardener; "we always have a week in advance. He paid everything yesterday morning up to Saturday next, but I hope, I'm sure, that I shall have you for a lodger a long while after you are Mrs. Latimer."

"I trust so," replied Lucy, merely for something to say, "for it is a very pretty place, and the lodging is very comfortable."

"One thing I wanted to ask, ma'am," continued the landlord, after another pause; "what's to be done with the gentleman whom they say is insane—with him, I mean, whom Mr. Latimer and the rest brought in yesterday and shut up in the room where he had the bars put? He must have some breakfast and dinner, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about him," replied Lucy, with surprise; "I heard a good many people coming and going yesterday, but I was in the other room, and am not aware of what happened."

"Well, ma'am, he can't starve," replied the landlord.

"Oh! certainly not," exclaimed Lucy; "he must have all that is necessary, of course. Can you not take it to him?"

"Why, you see, ma'am, I don't like to have anything to do with the matter," answered the gardener; "besides, the door is locked, and I haven't got the key."

"I suppose this is it," said Lucy, taking a large key from the mantel-piece.

But the landlord still shook his head, saying, "I don't like to have anything to do with it. But the man must have victuals, that's clear;" and he took a step back, as if to quit the room.

Poor Lucy was sadly embarrassed; she knew not what to say, or how to act, and the whole story

confounded and perplexed her. "Mad!" she thought—"what can Alfred have to do with a madman?" After a long pause for consideration, however, she inquired—"Is he dangerous?"

"Oh dear, no!" replied the landlord. "He seemed quite quiet. For my part, I should not have thought him mad at all."

"Then I will go to him myself," said Lucy, "if you will send up the maid to go with me, and see that he does not hurt me."

The worthy host did as she required; and though he had very little doubt that the gentleman up stairs was just as sane as he was himself, yet he remained with the door open in the little parlour below, to insure that they should have assistance in case of need. In the mean while, Lucy, having put on her bonnet and shawl to go out, followed by the girl, approached the door above—in some trepidation, it must be confessed. But there seemed no other means of insuring that the person within, whoever he was, should have that attention which humanity required; and without pausing to give time for fear to overpower her, she put the key in the lock and opened the door. The first object that met her eye was Mr. Morton seated at the table, and looking straight towards her. She stood for an instant motionless and speechless. Her countenance was pale, too, for fear was the first impression; but the next instant the blood rushed up into her face, and exclaiming, "Oh, Heaven!" she ran down the stairs before

Morton could rise to speak with her, and in another minute was out of the house. Hurrying on with a quick pace, she walked into the town with all her thoughts in confusion and disarray. Gradually, however, she became more tranquil, though it was a sad and dark tranquillity; an oppressive leaden weight, from the sad conviction that her worst suspicions of him who had so wronged herself were all too true.

Yet there was no choice before her what to do; she was the creature of his will, entirely dependent upon him. She had no means of escape from the situation in which she was placed—her fate was sealed and irrevocable. The only thing that could bring the slightest amelioration was to become his wife, and link herself to him for ever—to him whom she knew to be a villain, not only to woman, but to man. Despair has its own calmness, and after a time she thought clearly of what she should do, and determined to execute all that he had enjoined. Still she had some dread of again meeting Morton; and, looking anxiously up each street as she went, she made her way round by the least-frequented parts of the town to the dwelling of the clergyman. Thence, after leaving Lattimer's note, she directed her steps into the country, which was smiling in all the beauty of a fresh autumnal day. The atmosphere was peculiarly clear, the leaves of the trees were just tinged with the first yellow hues of advancing decay, the distant country looked purple in the early light, and

a small stream danced along by the road side in sparkling eddies and miniature cataracts. But the face of nature had lost its loveliness for Lucy Edmonds, and every object which once would have seemed bright and beautiful to her eyes, was now only full of sad remembrances.

At the distance of about a mile and a half from the town there was a small village, and a neat church, evidently of very ancient structure; for the yews in the churchyard and the ivy upon the walls showed the growth of many centuries, and the old Norman arch of the porch, with its deep and manifold mouldings, softened and pared away by the hand of time, spoke the reign of some early king, before the house of Anjou obtained possession of the crown. As Lucy approached, the bell began to ring with a cheerful and yet solemn sound, calling the villagers to supplicate and glorify God on the appointed day of rest. But, oh! how sadly did that chime sound in the ear of poor Lucy Edmonds—what memories did it not wake of the days of youth, when she, with the rest, went forth in her Sunday attire, beneath the protection of parental love, to prayer, to praise, and to instruction. She looked up wistfully towards the church—she longed to go in with others who were bending their steps towards the gate; but her heart sank, and she felt a fear and a dread.

She lingered, however, for a time in the churchyard, watching the passers by, and her eye from time to time rested upon the tombstones, where,

amongst homely phrases of commendation on the gone, she found many a text of Scripture full of hope and consolation.

“Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you,” said the inscription on one tomb; and another bore “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.” She took heart as she read, and with bent down eyes and a slow step she entered the church with the rest. She had not known comfort before since she left her father’s house, but as she prayed and listened she gained both consolation and strength. She resolved thenceforward to have but one rule for her life.

“If he keeps his word,” she thought, “to-morrow he will be my husband, and I am bound to obey him in all that is right; but, whatever be his own course, he shall not induce me to take any part in what is wrong.”

With this resolution she bent her way back to the town again, took the path to the house she had inhabited, and rang the bell. The door was opened by the gardener himself. “Well, ma’am, he’s gone,” he said, as soon as he saw her; “I couldn’t stop him, you know, when you left the door open, so I thought it best to be civil.”

“You did quite right,” said Lucy, in a calmer tone than she could have used in the morning. “I foolishly went away as quickly as I could, for fear of hearing that gentleman’s reproaches, though I

had no share in the injury that has been done him."

"Why, he did not seem at all inclined to reproach any one, ma'am," said the gardener; "he seemed a very civil sort of gentleman, indeed, and not mad in the least, I'm sure. He asked a great many questions about you, and stayed half an hour, I dare say, talking."

Lucy did not venture to inquire what Mr. Morton's questions had been, and, for fear she should hear what might be painful to her, she answered quickly, "Oh! no, he is not mad at all. However, I should not wish to see any one to-day, and should there be gentlemen here inquiring after him, you can assure them that he is gone."

"I hope, ma'am," said the landlord, with his habitual view to his own interest, "that if Mr. Latimer should make any row about his being let out, you will acknowledge you did it?"

Lucy bowed her head, replying, "I will do so, certainly."

"You had better say nothing about it till after the wedding," rejoined the landlord; "and then, when you are once his wife, I dare say you'll soon get the upper hand."

Lucy made no reply, but walked up stairs and wept.

Several hours passed by, and evening was approaching; when the maid took up a note, saying that a man had brought it from the inn. He

was waiting to see if there was any answer, the girl added. Lucy opened it with trembling hands, but glancing her eye at once to the bottom of the paper, she saw the word *Western*, and turning again to the beginning, read the following lines:—

“I grieve much for you, Lucy, and believe, my poor child, that you are more sinned against than sinning. I have good reason to suppose that you have been very badly used; but if this young man is really willing to make you his wife, I will say nothing to dissuade you from consenting to a step which is the only reparation he can offer. I do trust, however, Lucy, that the instructions you have received, the religious principles which were early implanted in your mind, and the example of your excellent parents, have not been so cast away as to admit the possibility of your continuing with him if this unhappy young man should neglect or delay to fulfil his promises. My eye is upon you, and it will become my duty to exhort you most earnestly to quit him at once in case of any delay taking place. Should you follow my counsel, and thereby show true repentance for any error you may have committed, which I believe to be less than many might suppose, come at once to me, and no effort shall be wanting on my part to place you in a situation of comfort, and to screen you from those reproaches and that hard treatment which never yet awoke an impenitent heart, and can only add to the

pangs of one that is truly penitent. You have known me from your infancy, and can trust me both as a counsellor and as your sincere friend.

“R. WESTERN.”

Long after she had read the letter and dismissed the maid, Lucy gazed at the lines with emotions very mixed, but yet hope predominated; for that very word “friend” at the end had something balmy and comforting to her breast. The rest of the evening passed over tranquilly, and Lucy was glad to be alone. For many days before solitude had been burdensome, terrible, to her; but now it was a relief, for the only light that she could receive, the only hope that could find place in her bosom, had been given from the high, pure source that offers peace to all who will accept it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE butler opened the door of Mallington House, in answer to Mrs. Windsor's bell, and looked at her with a meaning smile as she entered, saying, "You'll get it, ma'am, to-night, I've a notion; for Mrs. Charlton's in a queer way. She has scolded Miss Louisa till she cried, and at dinner she rowed me for the best part of an hour."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Windsor, drily, without the slightest appearance of intimidation. "I do not think she will scold me, for I have not done anything to deserve it;" and she pulled off her clogs deliberately in the little vestibule.

"Perhaps that is the very reason why she will," replied the butler, watching Mrs. Windsor in the delicate operation she was performing. "At all events, she has gone to her dressing-room, and rang for you three times, and she told Smith, who went up, that your conduct was too bad, and that she would put up with it no longer. So, if I were you, I would just keep away till to-morrow."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mrs. Windsor. "I shall go up directly. I could not tell she would go to bed before nine o'clock. She has a headache, I suppose, poor thing; and that always makes people cross."

"Why, I believe all this fuss about Mr. Morton disappearing has put her out," replied the butler; "but for my part, if I were you, I would let her cool; but you know best."

Mrs. Windsor, however, who did know best, and found all things exactly in the state she could have wished, signified once more her intention of presenting herself before her mistress, in so cool and satisfied a tone that the butler was disappointed.

There is certainly in the breasts of many persons a great pleasure in the communication of evil tidings; they like it, they approve of it; they take a philanthropic interest in preventing others from being too happy, lest they should become puffed up with prosperity. Now, the worthy butler had opened the door himself for Mrs. Windsor, with the express desire of enjoying the apprehension he thought his news would awaken; for Mrs. Windsor had too much the ear of their mistress—her place was too comfortable a one—for any of the other servants not to see that it would be greatly to her advantage to meet with a little mortification; and the benevolent butler was anxious to administer the first dose in person. Her perfect coolness, however, disappointed him,

and watching her take a candle, and walk straight up stairs towards Mrs. Charlton's dressing-room, he said, "Well, that woman has the impudence of the devil," and betook himself to his pantry again.

In the mean while the housekeeper knocked at the dressing-room door, and on hearing a sharp "Come in," she entered, saying, "The butler tells me, you wanted me, ma'am."

"Wanted you!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "I have been waiting for you this hour. I have rang three times for you, and the answer has always been that you were out. You are always gadding about, and I shall not put up with this any longer. You presume, because you are an old servant; but my patience is come to an end, and I will have different conduct."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, you had to wait," replied the housekeeper, in a tone of perfect civility, "but I don't see how I could help it, or what change I can make to please you."

"Do not answer me, Windsor," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, "I will not put up with any insolence."

"I am not going to be insolent in the least, ma'am," replied the housekeeper; "but when I am accused of neglecting my duty, I must say something for myself. I could not tell that you would go to bed so early. I am home two hours before your usual time, and—"

"I will not have you answer me in this way,"

exclaimed the lady again with increasing vehemence. "I will be obeyed by my servants at least, though Miss Charlton may think fit to be as insolent and self-willed as she likes."

It was too fair an opportunity for planting a hit to be neglected by Mrs. Windsor; and she instantly replied: "Ah! poor dear young lady; I am sure she is too gentle and tractable to be insolent or self-willed, whatever she may suffer."

"You impudent minx!" cried Mrs. Charlton, her eyes flashing fire, "do you mean to say I make Miss Charlton suffer? Well, upon my life, this is too bad—Oh! I can see it all. There's no use of more words. I dare say the housekeeper's room is ringing all day long with my unkindness to Miss Charlton. I'm a true step-mother, and everything Miss Charlton does is right, and everything I do wrong! All the neighbourhood hears of it, and not a lady's maid for ten miles round does not pity *the poor thing*! But I've seen your coggings and your flattery of her. I understand it all; but you may find yourself mistaken, all of you, for I'll put up with it no more, and make a clear house of you."

Mrs. Windsor had endeavoured in vain to interpose a word or two, not for the purpose of allaying her mistress's anger, but of adding fuel to the fire. The torrent of Mrs. Charlton's indignation, however, gave no opportunity, for she went on with a volubility which left no space between her words. Mrs. Windsor was well aware that the good lady

was not that gentle composed person, at all times, that she appeared in public; for more than once, even in her earlier and brighter days, she had seen little bursts of passion not at all dignified or pleasant. The present indulgence, however, was somewhat more than ordinary; but as things were taking the exact course that she could have desired, she determined to clench the affair by a slight touch of civil contempt; and, consequently, when Mrs. Charlton paused to take breath, after threatening to clear the house of her attendants, she replied, in a calm and deferential tone. "I think, ma'am, you had better consider of that first, for the servants might take you at your word. There are a good many of them, and their wages have not been paid for nine months!"

Mrs. Charlton's face grew redder than before. There was so much truth, however, in Mrs. Windsor's hint, and her finances for the time were at so low an ebb, that during several minutes she could only reply, "Well, I'm sure!" Mrs. Windsor, in the mean time, remained looking in her mistress's face, with a very provoking degree of placidity, till at length Mrs. Charlton, recovering her composure, nodded her head significantly, saying, "You shall go at least, my good lady. Make up your mind to that. I did not mean the other servants, but I mean you—and you understand me."

"Oh! yes, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor. "You mean to give me warning, and I take it

though I don't deserve such treatment. But that being settled, I will only tell you what I've been about this afternoon, which you would not hear before. I saw Mr. Spraggs this morning, and he had with him a gentleman who came down from the jewellers in London. I told him that I was sure in a week or ten days you would be able to pay everything, but he said they were not inclined to wait any longer. I persuaded him to go and talk to the other tradesmen, however, and as I didn't get any answer, I went down myself."

"And what did they say, Windsor?" asked Mrs. Charlton in a very much altered tone, for the housekeeper's intelligence, though partly fictitious and partly true, had instantly brought her to her senses.

"Why, ma'am, I did my best," replied Mrs. Windsor, "and they consented to wait till Saturday next."

"Well, then, it must be done before then," said Mrs. Charlton, speaking to herself.

"Have you any other commands, ma'am?" asked the housekeeper.

"No, Windsor, no," replied her mistress; and then added, in a coaxing tone, "you should not reply when you see me angry, Windsor. There, go away now, and let us forget all that's past."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Windsor, dropping a low courtesy; "but I can't quite forget. You have called me an impudent minx, and you have given me warning. No mistress

shall ever do so twice ;” and bringing, by a natural process which some women can command, a good deal of water into her eyes, Mrs. Windsor dropped another low courtesy and quitted the room.

Straight from Mrs. Charlton’s dressing-room the housekeeper, with her candle in her hand, and her eyes still comfortably red, took her way to the door of the drawing-room, opened it and went two steps in ; then suddenly stopped, as if in great surprise at seeing Miss Charlton and Dr. Western, who were seated on the sofa at a little distance, “I beg pardon, ma’am,” she said, “I thought you were gone to bed, and came to see that all was right ; but I’m really so flurried that I don’t know what I’m doing.”

“What is the matter, Windsor ?” said Louisa. “You look as if you had been crying.”

“Oh ! nothing, ma’am,” replied Mrs. Windsor ; “It is only that my mistress has given me warning.”

“You, Windsor !” exclaimed Louisa, in a tone of great surprise. “What could that be for ?”

“Oh ! ma’am, it is not for me to say,” replied the housekeeper in a humble tone ; “I dare say I was wrong, but I could not bear to hear those I respect spoken ill of, and I answered my mistress when I ought to have held my tongue. So she called me an impudent minx, and gave me warning.”

“Oh ! I dare say she’ll think better of it to-morrow,” replied Louisa, in a kindly tone. “She

angry about something to-night; she would be sorry to part with you, I'm sure."

"I beg pardon, ma'am," answered Mrs. Windsor; "but I cannot stay with her. I may be wrong in that too; but, after what she said of me and others, it's quite impossible;" and, putting her handkerchief to her eye, Mrs. Windsor, with another low courtesy, withdrew from the room. And so all that was settled quite to her satisfaction.

CHAPTER XX.

It must not be denied that Mr. Morton had passed a very unpleasant day and night before Lucy Edmonds opened the door of the room in which he was confined ; but I will not dilate upon many of the discomforts of mind and body which he underwent, confining myself to two only.

He had various important pieces of business to transact ; he knew that his presence, his signature, or his directions might be needed at any time, in regard to matters that would bear no delay ; he expected every day and every hour to receive news from London which might require instant decision ; and he did not at all like being deprived of his liberty at such a moment. But there was another circumstance still more unpleasant to him : he thought of the feelings of Louisa Charlton, of her anxiety, of her apprehensions regarding him ; he summed up in imagination all that he himself would have felt if she had so suddenly disappeared ; he added one half more for the difference

between the acuteness of a woman's feelings and those of a man; and thus he made himself as uncomfortable as might be during the whole of the day on which he was seized and the night that followed.

To see his door opened at all, then, was a relief to him, and when he beheld a woman's face, instead of that of Alfred Latimer and his accomplices, it was very satisfactory. But when he perceived who it was, other feelings arose, and all the interest which he had taken in the poor girl's fate instantly revived. "Lucy!" he exclaimed, "Lucy Edmonds!"

But Lucy stayed not to hear, and the sudden glance of surprise she gave him, the look of fear, and the burning glow of shame that followed, showed him at once that whatever was the cause of her coming, she had been utterly ignorant of his being there, and that she was both terrified and distressed to see him. He paused for a moment to consider rather what was the state of the poor girl's mind than what his own conduct should be.

The deep blush with which she had seen him answered him at least on one point; and, walking out through the door she had left open, he descended uninterrupted to the passage below, and, after pausing for a moment to see if any one would appear, he entered the parlour, where he heard somebody move. "Are you the master of this house?" he demanded, as the gardener stood

before him, not knowing very well what to say or do.

"Yes, sir," replied the gardener, "that is to say, I am the landlord—not exactly the master, for I let part of it."

"You must be aware, sir," said Morton, in a calm, grave tone, "that a very shameful and criminal act has been committed in bringing me hither. But I do not wish to speak upon that subject at present, as I shall take what measures I think fit hereafter."

"Lord, sir, I had nothing to do with it," replied the gardener; "I let my lodgings, and know little or nothing about what takes place in them. I'm sure it's no fault of mine."

"Perhaps not," replied Morton; "but, as I said before, on that subject I do not intend to speak just now. Is Mr. Latimer within at present?"

"No, sir," replied the gardener, in a respectful manner; "he has gone out for the whole day."

"And pray," demanded Morton, "in what relation does that young person who has just left the house stand towards him!"

"Dear me, sir, that is an awkward question," said the landlord; "I never asked them, not I."

"I should be obliged to you," said Morton, fully convinced that the man knew more, "to give me an explicit reply to my questions. You will not injure yourself by so doing, but the contrary. I take some interest in that young

person. Her father is a very faithful servant of mine, and an excellent man. I believe she is well-disposed herself, and I am afraid she has been ill-used by Mr. Latimer. Now, my only object is to know her real situation, in order to make him do what is right by her, if possible."

"Oh! if that's all," exclaimed the landlord, "I can make you quite easy about that. They are to be married to-morrow, at a quarter past nine. The banns will be published to-day for the third time, and I am to go with her to the church to-morrow to give her away."

Morton mused for a moment or two, and then inquired, "Do you really think that Mr. Latimer intends to fulfil this engagement?"

"What, marry her? Oh dear, yes, sir; I am quite sure of that," was the gardener's reply. "Why he need not have had the banns called if he didn't; and why should he make her ask me to go with her? Besides, bless you, sir! he's very fond of her, though he does worry her now and then."

"I trust it is as you say," replied Morton; "but nevertheless I shall take means to ascertain the facts, that, if he do not fulfil his promise, measures may be taken both to punish him and to protect her. It may be as well," he continued, "when she returns not to tell her that we have had any conversation upon this subject. My hat, I think, is in the room up stairs: be so good as to bring it to me."

The gardener obeyed with great alacrity, brushing the fine new beaver with his arm as he brought it down, and taking care to look into the hat to see if he could find the owner's name. He discovered nothing, however, for Mr. Morton was not one of that class of men who write their names in their hats.

"You will remember what I have told you," said Morton, when the landlord came down, "and not repeat our conversation to any one. I shall probably remain till after the hour appointed for the marriage, and you shall hear from me again according to your conduct."

Thus saying, he walked out, passed through the garden, and entered the lane. There he paused for an instant, not very well knowing which way to turn, for the walls on each side of the lane were high, and it was not till he had taken some twenty or thirty steps rather away from the town than towards it, that, on looking round, he perceived part of the steeple of a church in the opposite direction, and, turning back, he walked at a quick pace up the lane again, when suddenly he perceived a body of four or five men advancing towards him. At the head of the party was a gentleman with a low-crowned hat, a pig tail, and a pair of spectacles, with the capacious stomach, carried on by a pair of diminutive legs, enveloped in drab breeches and grey worsted stockings. There was no mistaking Mr. Quatterly: once seen he was known for ever. Morton's face be-

came certainly very joyful at the sight, and he walked straight up to his old friend, who did not recognise him till he was within twenty yards. But as soon as he did, Mr. Quatterly, on the impulse of the moment, took off his hat, and waved it over his head, exclaiming aloud—"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Here's little bo-peep who went to sleep. My dear sir, how do you do? I declare that though, in regard to the poor man of Tobago, you may—

'Imagine his bliss
When the doctor said this:
To a roast leg of mutton you may go.'

You cannot imagine my bliss at seeing you a free man. Why, we heard that you had been arrested—detained in prison without bail, and treated with all the rigour of the law—without a *fi. fa.*, a *capias*, or any other writ, injunction, or prescript whatsoever; and here am I, with this worthy magistrate, two constables, and an assistant, ready to deliver you, should it be necessary, by *habeas corpus*."

"A thousand thanks, my dear sir," replied Morton; "but luckily no such measures will be necessary now. I am at liberty, as you see; and, although a most gross and scandalous outrage has been committed, yet some consideration may be necessary before we proceed to punish the offenders."

"One of them I will certainly punish," said Mr. Quatterly, "though not for this offence, my

dear sir. I mean a certain Captain Tankerville, for I am determined that wild beast shall not go about the world any longer. I've got a string round his leg that he does not know of, and he sha'n't go far. As to the rest of the gentry, you can do as you think fit. I meddle with no man's charities, however absurd they may be. But let me make you acquaint with this worshipful J. P."—and he introduced Morton in form to the magistrate who accompanied him, and who, finding that the prisoner was at liberty, took his leave with his satellites, leaving Mr. Morton and Mr. Quatterly to go on to the inn.

Morton's first anxiety was in regard to Louisa, but it was not till the worthy solicitor had rung for breakfast, and ordered it, and made sundry observations upon the unshaved state of his young friend's chin, and begun and broken off his story half a dozen times, that Morton discovered that he, Mr. Quatterly, had visited Mallington. As soon as he was aware of the fact, however, he himself broke through the thread of the worthy solicitor's narrative to inquire whether he had been to Mrs. Charlton's and seen Louisa.

"No, my dear sir, no," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but I did better than present the fair lady with the person of an old lawyer. I sent her an old doctor of divinity. Set your mind at rest. Dr. Western went up to her immediately, to tell her you were quite safe, and I came over here to ensure that the tale was true. The worthy doctor

will be over here himself in an hour or two;—and now to other things.”

Mr. Quatterly then proceeded to entertain Mr. Morton with a variety of details, regarding the affairs of that gentleman himself, those of his unfortunate clerk, Mr. Wilkins, and those of Captain Tankerville; and he ended, as breakfast was brought in, by expressing a hope that Morton had not been put to inconvenience by want of the sum which Wilkins had carried off, and which had, in fact, been destined for his use. “As soon as I could make arrangements for trapping the fellow,” he continued, “I set off post myself, with the money in my pocket-book, deviating a little from my way to visit this town, information having reached me that my scamp had been seen at a village, about five miles off on the London road. He was gone before I arrived, and I went on to Mallington at once; not, indeed, that it was absolutely necessary I should in person carry you the money; but I had other news to tell you, and good news too—I have every reason to believe, my dear sir, that the whole of our important affair is settled. I have done it, I think, by a *coup de maitre*.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Morton. “How might it be, my dear sir? I know that you are very skilful in diplomacy, and learned in the law; but I did not expect that we should terminate this affair for three or four months to come, especially as we are in the long vacation.”

“It was by no stroke of diplomacy,” replied Mr. Quatterly, “nor by any legal process. On the contrary, it was by a proceeding quite out of all rule, and contrary to every etiquette. I begged a conference with our opponents, but seemed particularly unwilling that your worthy cousin should be present, he being a principal, and you not being on the spot. In this I calculated on the natural obstinacy of the human beast, and I was successful, for he insisted upon being at the meeting himself, saying, that you might come up if you liked it. Well, I submitted with an ill grace. I, upon your part, sole and alone; he, accompanied by his solicitors, Messrs. Clearwink and Writham, and by their junior, Mr. Dasherbald.—Had a clerk at my back, it is true, and an enormous blue bag.—When there I immediately addressed my legal brethren, pointing out my objection to principals being present; that was to throw the breach of all etiquette upon them, but they stoutly maintained your cousin’s right to hear all that was said; so then I immediately proceeded to business. I told them that my sole object was to save him needless litigation and expense, as I knew that his fortune would ill bear it; while yours, though too ample to be affected by any costs, would be quite as well without them. Our case was so clear, I said, that I had come to make what the French lawyers call a *communication des pièces*, which would satisfy them that they had no case to carry into court. When they heard this, my fraternity would have

given two or three fingers to get their principal out of the way ; but that was not to be done, and, without giving them more time than enough, I produced an abstract of your title, comprising a list of all documents and proofs in our possession ; and I could see our friend's countenance fall most sadly, as he heard me make out my case, step by step, leaving him not a leg to stand upon. Mr. Dasherbald was in a high state of irritation, protested against the irregularity of the whole proceeding, and appealed to my sense of professional etiquette ; for he had an unpleasant foresight of losing the fees on sundry briefs, if the suit was nipped in the bud. I would neither be stopped nor squabble, but went on to the end, and then cited to my gentlemen two or three instances of their own irregularity—pointing out, moreover, that having consented to the conference, and insisted upon a principal being present, their demurrer came too late. My effect was produced. Though very unwilling to admit it, even to himself, your opponent saw that his case was yours ; and the only question in his mind was, whether, out of spite, he should fight out a lost battle, and die in the field—if not in person, at least in fortune—or whether he should beat a retreat with what he had got left. Even the lawyers were a little staggered, for I had taken care to let them know that the sinews of war, on the part of the adversary, were less than they even themselves supposed ; so that, if their bill went beyond a

couple of thousand pounds, they were very likely to be minus the balance of account. I then said that, having shown them how the gentleman stood, it was for them to give him their best advice as to proceeding with a hopeless case. Mr. Dasherbald declared that he did not see the case was hopeless at all; and was proceeding in the same strain, when Clearwink pulled him by the sleeve, and said it might be better for them to confer apart. He then, having first whispered a word to Writham, retired with Dasherbald and Mr. Wilmot into another room; and Writham, setting his head on one side, with the insinuating look of a greyhound bitch, told me, in the gentlest tone possible, that he feared the greatest difficulty would be about their costs. I said, in reply, that there would be great difficulty, I did not doubt, in getting them from Mr. Wilmot. He shrugged his shoulders—asked who they could look to, if not to him; and added that, under circumstances, he thought they must plead, to give a chance for the said costs. Thereupon, in the good plain vernacular, I asked him if he would have them now, or wait till he could get them. He winked his eye, and said he did not know whether he rightly comprehended me. I replied, that you were a man who did not like trouble—hated lawsuits and lawyers, with a few brilliant exceptions—could easily calculate what the expenses of the case would be, if carried into court—knew perfectly well that no person in England can either

get his rights or keep them without paying for them—and therefore would, in all probability, be ready to make a sacrifice. After this the matter was all plain sailing: their bill was to be discharged by you, if satisfactory to me; and, if not, referred to arbitration, for Writham would not consent to have it taxed. To save their credit, some time for consideration was demanded. I handed them over the list of documents, and they are to let me have a definite answer as speedily as possible. It had not arrived when I set out after Wilkins, and I ordered it to follow me to Mallington without delay.”

“And, pray, what is become of this clerk of yours?” asked Mr. Morton. “You say you caught him at Mallington, and that he seemed very penitent. What have you done with him?”

“Set him free upon parole,” replied Mr. Quaterly. “Ah! I see you think it very extraordinary; but recollect, my dear friend, I never do anything like any other man, and such a course has this great advantage, that nobody ever knows where to have me. But this fellow has promised to ferret out for me our worthy friend Captain Tankerville, who has squeezed him like a sponge under his own fears. And now let us sit down to breakfast, after which you shall shave yourself, and we will go to church.”

Morton very willingly agreed to the proposal, in all its terms, though, undoubtedly, had he done what inclination prompted, he would have set off

for Mallington at once ; but, now that he knew Louisa's mind had been relieved in regard to his fate, he thought it in some sort a duty to wait for Dr. Western's arrival, in order to consult with him as to Lucy Edmonds. This he accordingly resolved to do ; but time passed, and Dr. Western did not appear. The young gentleman and his solicitor breakfasted, went to church, returned, and waited till past five o'clock before the worthy clergyman reached the town.

The time of Mr. Morton and his solicitor, indeed, was not wholly unoccupied ; for, when they came back from the morning service, they found Mr. Wilkins waiting for them, with the information that our highly respected friend, Captain Tankerville, was at an inn somewhat further down the street, and that he had received one or two communications from a young man, who came and went frequently between him and a cottage just out of the town, which Morton and Mr. Quatterly instantly concluded must be that inhabited by Alfred Latimer. Mr. Quatterly's measures were immediately taken. A magistrate was visited—information on oath filed against the worthy captain,—not as an accessory after the fact to Mr. Wilkins's robbery—not as an accessory before the fact to Mr. Morton's abduction—but as a principal, in having affixed other people's names to certain documents, greatly to his benefit and their loss. A warrant was at once made out, and Captain Tankerville was conveyed, from a

pint of sherry and a mutton chop, to the town gaol.

At length, towards evening, Dr. Western appeared, and great was his satisfaction to find his young friend at liberty. After having satisfied him in regard to Louisa, he listened, with deep interest, to all that Morton had to say regarding Lucy Edmonds, and agreed to wait, and be present himself in church next morning, in order to ascertain whether the marriage between her and Alfred Latimer did or did not take place. Mr. Quatterly determined to remain also, to look after his sheep-fold, as he termed the prison where Captain Tankerville was confined; but Morton resolved to see her he loved as early as possible on the following morning, and consequently, after having partaken of dinner with his two friends, he set out once more in a post-chaise for Mallington, towards half-past seven o'clock, calculating upon reaching that place by ten. But human calculations are all in vain. The chaise, having had more travelling than it approved of, broke down about seven miles from Mallington, and Morton had to sleep at a small public-house, in the first village he could meet with, after walking some miles on foot. He did not even reach this shelter till it was past eleven o'clock, and, consequently, judged it much too late to go on and present himself at Mallington House.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE constable, to whom the apprehension of Captain Tankerville had been confided, was a man of a peculiar conformation, both mental and corporeal. In figure he was short, fat, and squat; and the only indications of activity which his body displayed, were to be found in the neat, well-set leg and foot. His arms were short, but powerful, and furnished with a tremendous fist at the end, which, when once it got a grasp of anything, fixed upon it with iron rigidity; and, if employed upon the face of an adversary, brought at least double the space under its operation that could be covered by any other mortal fist. The mind was not altogether unlike the body: it had its points of obtuseness and rotundity, but, at the same time, it was a most vehemently active and energetic mind; and though, from a degree of fatness and heaviness in particular respects, it often operated in a wrong direction, it was sure to go on, with miraculous rapidity, on any road it thought fit to follow.

Often its speed and vehemence brought the worthy constable into situations which would have been extremely dangerous to other men, but, nine times out of ten, he was carried out of a scrape by the same celerity which had carried him into one.

When Mr. Morton had been gone about half an hour, and Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly were quietly seated over a cup of tea, Mr. Higginthorp, the constable, suddenly presented himself before them, and, advancing to the table, leaned his enormous knuckles upon it, saying, "I've nabbed the other fellow, your worships, and want to know what I'm to do with him."

Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly stared at each other, and then at the constable—"What other fellow?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"Why, the 'complice," replied the constable; "the accessuary after the fact."

"Who do you mean?" exclaimed the solicitor; "who killed Cock Robin?"

"Can't say, sir," answered Mr. Higginthorp; "but this here fellow is him as was a coming and going after the captain we've got in limbo. He says his name's John Blackmore; but I'd bet a dollar to a tenpenny nail that's an alias."

"In the name of fortune!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, "what did you nab him for, as you call it?"

"Oh! bless ye, sir, I always nabs 'em all," said Mr. Higginthorp; "we never can tell what may come out, and it makes all sure. It's seldom

a man undertakes any of these jobs single-handed, there 's most always a gang on 'em ; so, when I 've nabbed one as I 'm sure on, I nabs all that have been speaking to him particklar for four-and-twenty hours. Then, if nothing comes out, it can 't be helped, and there 's no harm done, you know."

" But there is harm done, Mr. Constable," replied Mr. Quatterly. " Why — devil take it ! — you 've got no warrant against him."

" Can't help that, sir," said Mr. Higginthorp, with a low bow ; " it 's what I always does. It 's the rule here."

" The deuce it is !" said Mr. Quatterly ; " but suppose this fellow prosecutes you for false imprisonment ?"

" He can't do that, sir," rejoined the constable.

" What ! when there 's neither any warrant against him nor any information lodged ?" asked the solicitor.

" No, sir," answered the constable ; " I lodges my own information, and executes my own warrant. I always does, and if so be as how it should turn out that he has had nothing to do with 't other job, why, you see as I caught him a-playing at cards on a Sunday in a public — he 's in for that. That 's all."

" 'Pon my life, you seem very well contented with your proceedings," rejoined the solicitor, " and put me greatly in mind of a certain Jack Horner who

‘ Put in his thumb,
And pulled out a plum,
And said ‘ What a good boy am I.’ ’

We don’t do these things in London, Master Constable.”

“ That ’s a pity, sir,” said Mr. Higginthorp ; “ but what I want to know now is what I ’m to do with him.”

“ ’Pon my life I can’t tell,” replied Mr. Quatterly. “ You are the best judge. Where is he ?”

“ Down stairs, in charge of my sub,” replied Mr. Higginthorp. “ Shall I bring him up ? Would you like to see him ? He ’s not a bad specimen of the thing.”

“ Why, perhaps you had better,” answered Mr. Quatterly, after a moment’s consideration. “ What do you think, my reverend friend ? This is the fellow, I suppose, who was coming and going between that pitiful swindler, Tankerville, and your acquaintance Latimer.”

“ That ’s just it, sir,” said the constable ; “ you ’ve hit it, my buck ; and, as for the matter of that, I shouldn’t wonder if he could tell us where Latimer ’s to be found, so as we could nab him, too.”

“ On no account,” exclaimed Mr. Quatterly ; “ there ’s no charge against him that I know, except that he ’s a fool.”

“ Better nab ’em all, sir,” said the constable, “ never can tell what may come out.”

“ Pooh !” replied Mr. Quatterly ; and Dr.

Western proceeded to ask, "Pray, what did you say was his name?"

"Why, as to that, I knows nothing," answered the constable. "He calls himself John Blackmore, your worship; but that 's an alias, I 'm sure. That cock won't fight."

"Why, I can tell you in a moment," replied Dr. Western, "whether he be John Blackmore or not."

"I'll bring him up," replied the constable, with his usual rapidity, and in an instant he was out of the room and down stairs.

"If this be the same youth that I mean," said Dr. Western, "he is, I am sorry to say, a very unworthy and profligate lad."

"Then he will not be the worse for a night's solitary confinement," replied Mr. Quatterly; but, before he could add more, young John Blackmore himself was brought into the room in the custody of Mr. Higginthorp, and a tall long-necked assistant. His face was as white as a sheet, for, like many another man, though he had the courage to commit bad actions, his resolution failed him at once under their consequences. The sight of Dr. Western, too, did not at all tend to reassure him, for he was well aware that those who knew most of his previous history were likely to judge most unfavourably of his present conduct.

"I am sorry to see you in your present situation, John," said the worthy doctor; but Mr. Quatterly, before he could proceed further, pulled

him by the sleeve, whispering, "Let him say what he likes; as we have no intention of proceeding against him, there cannot be any harm in suffering him to commit himself.—Now, sir," he continued, speaking aloud; "what do you know of this matter?" and he bent his eyes sternly upon the youth's countenance, looking at him through his spectacles as if they were two microscopes which could pry into his heart.

John Blackmore hesitated and stammered, endeavouring to gain time for thought by asking in a voice naturally feeble and womanish, "What matter, sir?"

"Don't squeak like a sucking pig, but speak out, sir," replied Mr. Quatterly, in a rough tone, "What matter!—the whole matter, to be sure—give an account of yourself for the last six weeks—it's your only chance, I can tell you."

Though neither very bright nor very courageous, fear acted the part of discretion with John Blackmore. He found out, or fancied, that the two gentlemen had some knowledge of the outrages committed upon Mr. Morton and the abduction of poor Lucy Edmonds, and on those two points he told all he knew. But there were more dangerous secrets which he sturdily kept to himself; and it was in vain that Mr. Quatterly with all his skill endeavoured to make him speak.

The youth remained silent, and the worthy solicitor turned to the constable's assistant, saying, "Take him away, man with the long neck; but

keep him safe below, while I talk with Mr. Higginthorp here."

John Blackmore was then removed, and turning quickly to the constable, the worthy solicitor demanded, "Well, Higginthorp, what do you intend to do with him now?"

"Poke him in the black hole, at all events," answered Mr. Higginthorp.

"I think you had better not," said Mr. Quatterly, with a warning shake of the head.

"Ay, but I will, though," rejoined the sturdy constable, "I'll tell you what, he's a bad un, that's clear, and I'm thinking as how he knows a trifle more than he says. So you see a touch of the solitary, no prog, and a cup of cold water, may bring it all out; and as for the rest I'll write him down in the book as one who was caught in the act of playing at cards in a public on a Sunday night. Then, if he says nothing, it can't be helped no how, and he'll be all the better for a little time to think. I've a great mind to put the darbies on him, just to take him down a bit. But he goes into the black hole anyhow, so there's no saying nothing against it."

"Well, you must do as you think fit about that," replied Mr. Quatterly. "The solitary, as you call it, mayn't be a bad punishment, if you prove he's been playing at cards to-night."

"Competent witnesses," said the constable drily. "Bless ye, sir, a night in the straw will

do him all manner of good — good-night, gentlemen. If I hear any more to-morrow morning early I will favour you with it,” and thus saying, he made his bow and walked out to execute his purpose of putting John Blackmore into the black hole.

CHAPTER XXII.

Now, the black hole of the town of —, to which young Blackmore was very appropriately conveyed, was of a peculiar construction. In former times there had stood, in the very centre of the market-place, a large triangular pile of old, small, dilapidated buildings, used chiefly as low shops, some of which were only opened on market days; the remaining portion of these edifices had been occupied, as tenements, by the poor of the place, and supplied, to every crowd collected, upon whatsoever occasion, a numerous accession of dirty ragged urchins, full of fun, mischief, and stentorian lungs. All magistrates, but especially town-councillors, have a great and laudable dislike to the poor, and, more particularly, to poor boys: they hate their rags—they hate their fun—they hate their mischief, as they ought to do; and these buildings were, moreover, an eye-sore to some architectural geniuses amongst the civic authorities. The age being an age of improvement, and it being in

general admitted that the poor ought to have no houses to live in, the magistrates—they called themselves the town—bought these ancient buildings of their proprietor, gave notice to quit to the tenants, and announced their intention of improving the market-place by their demolition. The scheme was carried into effect; but it suggested itself to an architect, who was brother-in-law to the mayor, that the public square would look very bare and shabby without some edifice in the centre; and, as the town was much troubled with birds of a certain feather, it was resolved to build a cage for them. But, in pulling down the old houses, a number of cellars were discovered: some were filled up before the bright idea of the cage presented itself, but one or two remained; and the architect determined to employ one of these as a black hole for more refractory prisoners, immediately below the building above. Being a man of genius, and having a touch of classical knowledge, he designed his cage upon the model of a temple of Mercury. This temple was, accordingly, raised upon a flight of four stone steps, up which the destined inhabitants of the place usually walked very unwillingly; but just within the portico—for it, too, had a portico—was a small, iron-bound door, which led, by a narrow staircase, some ten feet down into the cellar, now denominated the black-hole. The name was not ill-bestowed; for black and dreary, most assuredly, it was. Not that it received no light; for there

was a sort of spiracle above, which admitted just sufficient to allow the prisoner to grope about, and see something of the misery of the den to which he had been consigned. It gave enough air, too, to allow a man to live with some oppression of chest, but in a very small degree, if at all, to mitigate the damp unwholesome stench. It was, in short, a capital place for getting up a typhus fever; and had, more than once, proved very successful in that respect, when the tenant took up his occupancy on a Saturday evening, and remained there till the magistrates met at noon on the Monday.

In this black-hole, then, furnished as we have described, young John Blackmore was safely lodged on the night of Sunday, after having been interrogated by Mr. Quatterly. He very soon found that even his father's cottage, which he had been accustomed to consider the most disagreeable place on earth, might have afforded him a much more agreeable lodging than that which was now provided for him. He would have preferred with the water, which the constable and his man supplied, an admixture of gin. The straw also scratched him and annoyed him, and the odour of the place was anything but pleasant to his olfactory nerves. But all these sensations were as nothing when compared with those which succeeded, when left alone in the darkness of the night, with nothing to converse with but his own thoughts.

For some time the various noises in the town enlivened him a little: carts rolled along, with cheerful voices talking; even a carriage was heard whirling through the market-place, and then receding with a slowly-diminishing sound, like the distant roar of thunder, fading away into the rustle of the sea upon a pebbly shore. A party of merry lads sang a gay song, which he had often sung in other days; and for several minutes their voices were heard echoing through the streets, faint and more faint, like the memories of youth. Then came a pause, broken only by the church clock striking, solemn and high up towards the sky, like the voice of an angel in the air, warning man of the rapid course of mortal time. Then there was a dead silence; but it, too, was at length interrupted by the uproarous merriment of a drunken Saturday night party reeling home to their miserable wives. After that, all was still.

The air seemed heavy with thought; it oppressed him—weighed him down. He tried to sleep, but he could not. He fancied that he would be game to the last: he said, “D—n them! they sha’n’t frighten me;” but to whomsoever he meant to apply the pronoun “they,” it was not any other individual who frightened him—it was himself. He had no support within—he had nothing to rest upon in his own heart. He tossed about upon the straw for some time in terrible mental anguish. He made a struggle for firmness and for fortitude. He wavered, he hesitated;

but gradually solitary thought, like time wearing away the masonry of some ill-constructed building, undermined all his powers of resistance ; and, starting suddenly up, he exclaimed, " Hang me ! if I do not tell all. Why the devil should I lie here, like a dying dog in the straw, and very likely get myself scragged into the bargain, for a set of fellows who don't care a pin about me ? Even Latimer could only afford to give me five shillings for riding over all that way to warn him. I'll take care of myself, or they will bring me in as an accomplice ;" and thus saying, he found his way up the stairs, and knocked loudly at the door above, fondly fancying that the constable was there on guard. Nobody answered, however ; for Mr. Higginthorp was by that time at least half a mile distant, soundly snoring in his bed, and dreaming of captions, and warrants, and arrests. From the inside of the cage no reply was returned, but by the hollow voice of emptiness ; and young Blackmore knocked again, harder than before, saying to himself, " The old codger's sound asleep."

He soon became aware, however, that there was nobody there—that he was left totally alone, in the midst of the market-place—that if he was ill, he might be ill—that if he died, he might die, without any one to assist, to support, or to comfort him. He sat down upon the steps, and, leaning his head upon his hands, had well-nigh given way to tears. But who can tell all the horrors of that night, as he lay, in the desolation of captive

wickedness, calculating upon the events of the morrow ! Most likely, he thought, the constable would not come again till it was time to take him before the magistrates ; and what might not happen in the interim ? Others, more guilty than himself, might be detected—caught—induced to turn king's evidence, and thus cut him off from all the merit of confession. He had been warned by the solicitor that he was casting away his last chance, and now he thought it was done—that very likely the opportunity was lost for ever, and that his own obstinacy had sealed his fate. There was nobody near to hear the confession that he longed to make—the earth was round him like a living grave—the bars, the bolts, the stonework kept him in, and prevented him from executing what fear, if not penitence, prompted ; and he felt as we might suppose the spirit of the dead must feel when a life of impenitence is at an end, and the dark irrevocable barrier of the tomb dropped between mortal crime and the backward path of repentance and amendment. Oh ! how he writhed under the tortures of his own fancies !—how everything horrible, within the range of possibility, was presented to his imagination during that long, dark, sleepless night of silence and solitude !

At length a faint, grey stream of light began to pour from the spiracle we have mentioned, and painted a long ellipse upon the floor, or rather upon the pavement of the place. At first it was

so dim that he thought his eyes deceived him, but gradually it grew brighter, and then changed from grey, through a sort of dove-colour, to a rosy hue, and he could hear a distant bird singing sweetly. It was certainly day, and the light revived some hope, though faint, faint indeed. All firmness was gone—all thought of resistance was at an end: he was prepared to say anything—to do anything, that might deliver him from such horrors as he had endured, and those still more terrible which he anticipated. At length the noise of a foot-fall caught his ear, heavy and slow. It was that of a townsman passing to his work; and, getting as near to the spiracle as he could, the prisoner called to him to tell the constable that somebody wanted to speak with him at the cage. The man heard him not, however—or, at least, took no notice; and on he plodded, with the same slow, heavy step, without the least interruption.

“They can’t hear me,” said young Blackmore; “I am shut out from every resource. What shall I do?—what shall I do?” and he wrung his hands in bitter despair.

Then again he crept up the steps, and stood watching for any opportunity. Seven o’clock struck—eight o’clock—it was approaching nine, when a brisk active step was heard, and then the rattle of a key, the drawing of a bolt, and before the door at the top of the steps could be opened, the unhappy lad knocked hard, exclaiming, “Mr.

Constable ! Mr. Constable ! I want to speak to you."

The next moment the door was thrown back, and the gruff voice of Mr. Higginthorp exclaimed, "What the devil are you knocking for? What do you want, you young blackguard?"

"I want to tell all," exclaimed John Blackmore; "I want to ease my mind."

"I've a notion you're a bit too late, my kiddy," answered Mr. Higginthorp; "you should have spoken last night;" and then he added, at a venture, "Ah! people are after them fellows, and, I dare say, have caught them by this time. Some of them will stag, in course, and may, perhaps, be beforehand with you."

"I don't care," cried young Blackmore; "I will tell all, to put myself at rest."

"Stop, stop a bit," cried Mr. Higginthorp; "I mustn't hear nothing till I've got sum'un to witness that I warned you properly."

"No, no! let me tell!" cried the youth, almost frantically, "I want no warning."

"It won't do, young cove, it won't do," replied the constable; "I knows better. We must have everything in order. I'm not going to be hauled up and rated for pumping a prisoner, not I. There, go down a bit--go down, I say, or I'll pitch you down head-foremost."

Driven back into his den, the unhappy youth remained waiting at the bottom of the stairs for about five minutes, at the end of which time he

was called up again into the cage to the presence of our friend Mr. Higginthorp, and his long-necked assistant. The door was shut and locked, and the constable, in the first instance waving his hand to enjoin silence, addressed a sort of prefatory discourse to his companion in the following terms:—"You see, Neddy, this here young man, as we nabbed last night, declares his intention of making a full confession. But I wouldn't hear a word, not I—not a single syllabus, till you were present to bear witness that I uses no inducement whatsoever to make him do that same, but that I warns him, on the contrary, that what he says will be taken down, and may be used agin him—not that I say it will, because I thinks—howsoever, that 's nothing to nobody what I thinks; and so now, being warned, you may go on, young man, if you likes.—Stop a bit; bring me that stool, Neddy, and hold the ink here that I may dip my pen;" and he wrote at the top of the paper in a good clerkly hand, using the stool for a table: "The confession of John Blackmore, junior, taken before us, Thomas Higginthorp and Edward Scraggs, constable and sub-constable, &c., on this — day of —, in the year of our Lord —," "Now go on if you likes."

"Well, I declare, I have nothing to do with it whatever," said young Blackmore.

"He declares he has nothing to do with it whatsoever," wrote Mr. Higginthorp, reading the words aloud at the same time.

“And I only heard it by accident one day when I was in a public-house with Maltby and Jack Williams.”

“He only heard it promiscuous when he was in a public with Jack Williams and—what was the other gentleman’s christian name,” inquired Mr. Higginthorp.

“William Maltby,” replied the youth, and Mr. Higginthorp put it down.

“They were talking at first very low,” continued young Blackmore, “and then they talked louder, and I soon made out that Mr. Williams intended to break in this very night, into Mallington Hall, and take away all the plate and stuff they could find.”

“Was that this ere night as is passed, or that ere night as is a coming?” asked Mr. Higginthorp.

“That that’s passed,” answered the lad; and Mr. Higginthorp proceeded to write down, reading aloud at the same time—“Jack Williams and William Maltby intended to break in”—

“No, no!” cried young Blackmore, eagerly; “I did not say Bill intended to break in; for Williams said he wouldn’t have him; that he was not up to the mark for such a job. That was what made them speak so loud, for they had well nigh had a bit of a row about it. But Williams said he would give him a couple of hundred for his share, and he’d have no risk; and that he’d get Mr. Latimer to help, who was up to anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter.”

"Manslaughter!" said Mr. Higginthorp, writing.

"Then, here, on Saturday night," continued Mr. Blackmore, junior, "I was sent over as fast as I could gallop with a note to Mr. Latimer from John Williams himself."

"What did you gallop upon?" demanded the constable.

"Upon a horse, to be sure," replied the youth, peevishly, beginning to fancy that Mr. Higginthorp was making a jest of him, and feeling his situation no joke.

"It might have been an ass," said the constable, gravely. "Go on."

"Why, then I found Mr. Latimer and Captain Tankerville together; but the captain soon cut his stick, and not long after Jack Williams himself came over with a horse and gig, and Mr. Latimer went away with him, for I watched. What they've done I don't know, but what they went to do I can very well guess."

"We must have no guess work," said Mr. Higginthorp. "Facks—facks is what we wants; so if you've got any more on 'em you may bring 'em out. That's to say if you likes. I holds out no inducements—not I."

The unfortunate lad added a few more particulars of no great importance, and then, looking up piteously in the constable's face, he inquired, "Now I've told the whole truth exactly as it is. Do you think there is any chance for me?"

"Why, I can't exactly say," answered Mr.

Higginthorp, scratching his head ; “ howsomever, you see, young man, you are but a cessuary before the fack, and not arter, which is something in your favour. Then you made full confession before examination—that’s summat more. However, I says nothing—I promises no man nothing ; but I think, now you’ve cleared your stomach, we may leave you in this here cage, where you’ll be safe enough. But I must run and tell the magistrate.—Here, read that over, Neddy, and put your sig., then I’ll do the same and be off. When I’m gone you can get him a basin of cocoa and a roll, to keep his spirits up. One should always fatten informers, as one does hens to make them lay the better ;” and with this strange axiom Mr. Higginthorp took his departure.

When he and his companion were gone, and young Blackmore had partaken of his cocoa and his roll, the youth began to suspect, from various signs and symptoms, that previous to the confession just made, neither Mr. Higginthorp nor the magistrates had known anything of the proposed robbery at Mallington Hall, and that consequently he himself had very probably put his friend’s neck in a halter, for which he was not a little sorry.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE must now quit the interesting prisoner for a while and return to one equally respectable, though born in a higher station. The night was dark, the moon had gone down, the sky showed not a star, when Alfred Latimer, jumping into the gig with Williams, on the night of the preceding Saturday, drove away with him on the road towards Mallington. At first they went very slow, for the lanes at the back of the town were somewhat intricate, and the obscurity which pervaded the whole air rendered it somewhat difficult to make their way on in safety without lights. Neither of them spoke a word, for Williams was naturally taciturn, except when possessed by the wild and eager spirit of adventure, which, in the intervals between conception and execution, would sometimes break forth in descriptions full of a rude but powerful eloquence. Alfred Latimer, too, had plenty of matter for thought, and, to say the truth, his heart was as dark and cheerless as

the night air through which he passed. Bankrupt in purse and reputation, contemned by those who might have loved and esteemed him, alienated from those classes of society in which he was born to move, cut off from all chance of raising himself above that rank from which he had chosen his companions, hopeless of improving his means but by adding crime to vice, with nothing to look back upon in the past but wasted advantages and evil passions pampered, with nought to hope for in the future but a wild life of feverish pleasure, mingled with daily peril, and intervals of sickly lassitude, he was going to take the first profound plunge into the dark ocean of crime, and to render the whole of the rest of life full of remorse and apprehension. Thoughtless, rash, unprincipled as he was, he could not but feel such things, and that feeling kept him silent.

At length the air breathed freer around them, when no longer within the walls and hedges, and the faint outline of the open country, sloping up towards the hills between them and Mallington, could just be caught by the eye. It seemed to Alfred Latimer like the fate before him—dark, indistinct, and gloomy, with some shadowy traces of great things, he knew not what, rising in the vague distance, to the eye of fancy. His heart felt chilled and cold; for every man has his moments of remorse: moments when a stern conviction of the excellence—the peace—the joyfulness of that virtue which we have cast away, is

forced upon us, in sad and solemn contrast, with a sickening loathing of the vices we have cherished. The images of his earlier days rose up before him, whether he would or not. He thought of what he might have been : of what happiness—brightness—honour, might have surrounded his path. Memory ran back over the years gone by, up to his very early youth. He recollected his mother's marriage with Mr. Charlton, and all the wild dreams of riotous indulgence with which he had pampered his fancy, at the thought of her having the command of the old man's wealth. What might not that wealth have done for him? he now asked himself. It might have secured him advancement in every way, success in every pursuit—good education, a fair start in life, support at any moment of difficulty—and he could not but feel that it was he himself who had cast away all such things. I say he felt it—not that he thought it. It was an impression: the operation of the heart more than of the mind—of the spirit more than of the intellect; and whenever he found that he was deviating into what he considered the weakness of remorse, he forced his thoughts to take the burden of his own shoulders, and cast it upon others. “Ay,” he said, mentally, “that old man always hated me. He might have done a great deal for me, if he had liked; and, if he had been a little kinder, I might have been a very different person from what I am.” He forgot that Mr. Charlton had been a great deal kinder than

he deserved; that he found him incurably rash, headstrong, and passionate. "Yes, it is all his fault," he continued, pondering over the past. "If I hadn't known that he had hated me, I should have been inclined to do everything that people wished; but he's gone to the devil now, and, I dare say, he's paying for it—a hard, miserly, old hound."

Still, however, he brooded; and still dark regret and sorrow would make themselves felt; and the consciousness of having been a fool and a scoundrel hung vaguely over him, keeping him in gloomy silence while they rolled along, till the horse began to slacken his pace as the road wound slowly up the hill; and, at length, his companion spoke, remarking, "You are devilish silent, Mr. Latimer."

"So are you, Williams," replied Alfred Latimer.

"Ay, it's my nature, but not yours," answered Jack Williams; "and I was thinking that, perhaps, after all, you may not like this job. Now, I'm not fond of having to do with waverers."

"I'll tell you what, Jack Williams," replied the young man, in a low, stern, determined tone; "I'm in that sort of way just now, that I'd shoot my own father for a thousand pounds."

"No need of that," replied Jack Williams, carelessly; "nor your mother either. You can get more than that without shooting any one. However, I see you are up to the thing; that's something. It's no very difficult affair, after all; and,

once it's done, and the white coast of England left far behind us, we may lead a life such as men lived in old days, and put the wide blue sea under contribution. I know a place—where I've left one that's very dear to me—in a deep cove of which, all surrounded by high blue hills, one could hide away a man of war as easily as I could cover a hazel-nut with my hand. All that we shall want, however, is a good schooner and a gallant crew. There are some twenty or thirty fellows thereabout—some doing one thing, some another—who would be glad enough to come to my whistle, and many more will join us. Then we'll make our own laws, Mr. Latimer; and better a great deal will they be than all the long rigmaroles that a set of gabbling fools pass in what they call parliament. We've no need of all such long stories. Half a dozen simple rules will be quite enough for us; and we'll be at peace amongst ourselves, and at war with all the rest of the world. I don't know a finer thing than, on the 'clear, starlight nights of that part of the world, to stand either upon the deck, or upon one of the high rocks, and look out over the glistening sea for a white sail, with a rich freight aboard. Then after her, like a swallow after a fly, and haul her colours down and bring her into port."

The vision that he called up was just what was wanted to rouse Alfred Latimer from the doubts which had begun to take possession of him, and, during the next two or three miles, he and his

companion continued to talk upon such pleasant themes, till gradually their conversation reverted to the present, and the scheme which they were about to execute was now first fully made known to Alfred Latimer. At another moment, perhaps, there might have been something in the whole affair which would have startled him ; but despair, and the disastrous state of his circumstances, and the wild vision of a free and adventurous life of enjoyment which had been just presented to his imagination, combined to smother everything like hesitation. He rejoiced at the thought of the booty that was to be obtained ; and only asked how they were to dispose of the plate when they had got it.

“ Oh ! turn it into money, to be sure,” replied his companion.

“ Ay, but how is that to be done ?” asked Alfred Latimer.

“ Oh ! there are ways and means,” answered Williams ; “ and I sent word to a fellow in London who, a good many years ago, used to take game and venison, and such things, off my hands, and who ’s now as rich as a Jew, to come down, and bring plenty of money with him. I gave him a hint of the sum that would be needed, too ; so he ’ll come prepared, and I think we had better stop to-night at the place where he ’s likely to be found, if he ’s arrived yet.”

“ Where ’s that ?” answered Alfred Latimer.

“ At Mr. Gatton’s, to be sure,” replied Williams.

"Why, not the great inn, the Bell, at Sturton!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer.

"Ay, ay," said Williams; "there are more things done at that inn than you know of. Besides, he travels quite like a gentleman, and has got his own little goods-cart marked on the back, 'Moses Levi, draper, Burton-on-Trent.'"

Alfred Latimer laughed; but yet, as the Bell at Sturton was the largest inn in the neighbourhood, he could not conceive that the well-known Jack Williams would be a welcome guest to the worthy landlord. Nevertheless, there are more things between heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any man's philosophy, and so it proved in this instance.

It was about two o'clock when they drove into the yard of the Bell, but they still found the people of the house up, for there had been a club dinner there that day, and some of the party, half muddled with wine, were still engaged in playing at cards in a room up stairs. The landlord himself was in the bar, a stout, well-made, hawked-faced man; and when Williams and his companion entered, the host nodded to the sailor, as to an old acquaintance, displaying no sign of coolness.

"Pray, Mr. Gatton," said Williams, "has Mr. Levi come here to-day?"

The landlord nodded again, and the other went on to inquire, "Is he in bed yet?"

"No," answered Mr. Gatton; "he's up stairs, number twenty-three."

Williams thanked him for the information, and was turning away to seek the room indicated, when the landlord exclaimed, "Williams! Williams! I want to speak with you;" and then added, in a low tone, when the other approached nearer, "I wish you could get me a dozen more of those handkerchiefs."

"You shall have them," said Williams, with a significant look; and once more resuming his course, he led Alfred Latimer up two pair of stairs, and then along the corridor, examining the numbers over the doors as they passed. At number twenty-three he knocked, and a voice from within said, in a sort of abstracted tone, "Come in," upon which the two gentlemen entered. The name of Moses Levi had suggested to the imagination of Alfred Latimer the figure of a little fat, dirty, blear-eyed Jew. What was his surprise, then, to behold a tall, well-proportioned, and good-looking man of about forty-eight or fifty, dressed with scrupulous neatness. He was seated at a table, with a small bowl beside him, from which probably issued the strong odour of punch with which the air of the room was impregnated. An inkstand was nearer to him than the bowl, and a neat-looking, apparently well-kept note-book was open before him, over which he bent, pen in hand, seemingly calculating his well-gotten gains. So busily was he employed that he did not look up till Williams and his companion were far in the room, but he then raised his face towards

them, displaying very handsome features, though not without a peculiar, keen, and cunning look generally displayed by the race from which he sprung.

"Ah, Jack!" he cried, starting up and shaking Williams heartily by the hand, "I am glad to see you. Why we haven't met I don't know how long. This is a friend of yours, I suppose."

"Mr. Latimer," said Williams, introducing the two to each other; and Mr. Levi bowed and scraped as ceremoniously as an ambassador.

"Come, sit down, gentlemen," said Mr. Moses Levi. "We'll have some more glasses and some punch, and then we'll talk of business."

The glasses and punch were brought, and Alfred Latimer took a liberal supply, while Williams helped himself more carefully, and, after a few words upon ordinary subjects, Mr. Levi proceeded as follows:—"Well, Mr. Williams, I got your message, and, though it was rather inconvenient for me, I came down at once, because I know you never disappoint one—I suppose this gentleman is one of us, though I don't know him."

"All right," said Williams. "Have you got the money with you?"

"Why, not the whole sum," replied the Jew. "I hadn't got as much in the house. Why, five or six thousand pounds is a great amount, you know—what a job it must be!"

"How much have you brought?" asked Williams.

"Somewhere near upon three thousand pounds," answered his London friend.

"That won't do," replied Williams, who knew his man. "If you haven't got the whole you may as well go back again."

"Ay! but that will do to pay part," rejoined Levi; "and you can touch the rest in London, you know."

"It won't do, Moses," reiterated the other, with a shake of the head. "We must make a finish of it all at once. So if you are not ready, I must send to Solomons."

"No! no! no!" cried Mr. Levi. "Don't be so hasty, Jack; if I haven't got the money with me I can get it in five minutes. I never need to send to London for money when there's a banker in the town."

"Yes, but Sunday is coming on," said Williams, "and we must have it paid all in gold."

"Well, well, that can be done," said his respectable friend. "Leave all that to me. The money shall be ready in the twinkling of an eye."

"In short, you've got it with you, Moses, that's the fact," was Williams's very just rejoinder.

Other points were then discussed, the value of gold and silver plate—at least, the value that Mr.

Levi chose to put upon them,—the price of guineas, which in a time of proper currency were very dear, and several other particulars. Mr. Levi sought to drive a hard bargain, but Jack Williams knew him, and would not let him. The latter talked of sending for another receiver of stolen goods, and the former represented the difficulty of getting rid of articles so purchased. He admitted, however, that he had brought crucibles, and fluxes, and scales and weights with him, so that any wrought vessels that might be presented to him for purchase would be made into what he called soup, or melted before he left the house, thus losing every mark by which they could be identified. The whole affair was barely adjusted when some one knocked at the door, and Mr. Levi, putting by his pocket-book, bade them come in. The figure that appeared was that of the landlord, who closed the door, and, walking slowly up to the table, said, addressing Williams, “I thought it just as well to tell you, Jack, that Harry Soames, the constable from Mallington, has been over here this afternoon, asking a number of questions about you, and whether you had lately been seen in Sturton, and when—it’s no harm knowing, you know.”

“Oh! no,” replied Jack Williams, in a careless tone; “if he asks again, give him my compliments, and tell him I shall be very happy to see him when he calls. Perhaps I shall call upon him some day.”

The landlord laughed with a meaning chuckle, and Alfred Latimer gave an intimation that it was his intention to go to bed.

“Why, I am going to bed, too,” said Mr. Gatton, “for I’m tired; but I’ll send the chamber-maid, sir,” and he went away.

“We must be off before daylight to-morrow, Mr. Latimer,” said Jack Williams, “for it wouldn’t do for Soames to find you and I together. I’ll wake you in time, however,” and so they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

To explain the cause of Harry Soames's visit to Sturton, and his inquiries for Jack Williams, we must now treat of a very uninteresting person and his uninteresting history. On the Saturday, an hour after noon, the constable of Mallington received a summons to the house of Mr. Middleton, the magistrate, which, as the reader knows, is situate at the distance of about a mile and a half from the village. As he had a liking for the active exercise of his profession, Mr. Soames trudged over willingly enough, and on presenting himself was kept for about a quarter of an hour in the hall, while voices were heard talking in the little room at the side. At the end of that period the door of that room opened, and Miss Mathilda Martin issued forth, while the voice of Mr. Middleton was heard to say "Thank you, Miss Martin, thank you : I always was sure he was an impostor. I will look to it, I will look to it."

Miss Martin passed Mr. Soames without deign-

ing to speak to him; and immediately after the constable was called to the presence of the magistrate, who as he entered inquired of the servant who ushered the man in whether Sir Simon Upplestone had arrived.

The servant answered in the negative, and Mr. Middleton, seating himself again with an important air, remarked, "I fear, Soames, we may be accused of neglect of our duty in suffering this young man to remain so long in Mallington under such suspicious circumstances."

"Is it Mr. Morton your worship was talking of?" asked Soames.

"To be sure," answered Mr. Middleton; "he is the only person to whom the terms I have used could apply. From various circumstances, I have not the slightest doubt that he is neither more nor less than a swindler, and will ultimately be identified with the clerk who has absconded from London."

Harry Soames scratched his head, and as Mr. Middleton was well aware that he was not a man dull of comprehension, he could not conceive what made the constable hesitate in this unwonted manner. He accordingly asked "What is the matter, Soames?"

"Why, I was thinking, your worship," said the constable, "that Gibbs could tell us more of the matter, if he liked."

"And who the devil is Gibbs?" asked Mr. Middleton solemnly.

“Why, the travelling perfumer man, your worship,” answered the constable. “He who has been down here so long hanging about with his Fragrant Balm of Trinidad. He has let out to me more than once that he knows summut of Mr. Morton. But the difficulty will be to make him speak.”

“We ’ll grant a warrant against him,” said Mr. Middleton. “He may be art and part in the offence for ought we know.”

“Better summons him as a witness, your honour,” said Soames. “A warrant would be a stopper, I should think.”

“Perhaps it might,” replied the magistrate, sagaciously. “We will summons him as a witness. Get me down ‘Burn’s Justice,’ Soames. There it stands. I expect Sir Simon Uppelstone every moment,” he continued, after having looked into the magistrate’s text-book for some minutes. “In the mean time, you go down, and bring up this man, Gibbs. Tell Skinner to send some one to act as our clerk; and take measures to prevent this young vagabond from making his escape.”

“Lord bless your worship!” replied Mr. Soames, “he has been off from Mallington House, ever since early this morning.”

Mr. Middleton looked aghast; but Soames consoled him the moment after by informing him that he had good reason to believe Mr. Morton was only over at Sturton, and then proceeded

to execute his mission, which occupied rather more than an hour.

He returned with Mr. Gibbs, who came very unwillingly, trying hard by the way to gather from the constable what the magistrates wanted. But Mr. Soames would not say a word, and Mr. Gibbs was ushered into the presence of the two magistrates, perfectly ignorant of their object in sending for him.

"Now, Mr. Gibbs," said Sir Simon Uppelstone, "tell us what you know of this matter?"

"I don't know what the matter is, sir," answered Mr. Gibbs. "I only know that the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad is incomparable in its qualities, nourishing and strengthening the hair, encouraging the growth of eye-brows and whiskers, restoring the supreme ornament of the human person to a glossy black or brown hue, when it has become grey with time or care, and invigorating and restoring the graceful natural curl, when, either by the effects of tropical climates, or"—

"Pooh, pooh!" said Mr. Middleton. "Sir Simon, we must put the question in another form, and carry on the examination regularly. Now answer, Mr. Gibbs—you know a person who calls himself Morton?"

"I have that honour, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"Not a great one, I fancy," rejoined the magistrate, who piqued himself upon saying smart things. "Now, answer me truly, for we shall

swear you to your deposition. Have you any reason for believing that this Mr. Morton, as he calls himself, is ever known by any other name?"

Mr. Gibbs was confounded, and knew not what to answer. He would have fain plunged into the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad, which, in difficult circumstances, had often proved to him an invaluable resource. But in the present instance he did not know how to bring it in, and in the confusion of the moment, replied, "Perhaps I have."

"Take that down," said Mr. Middleton, addressing one of Mr. Skinner's young men, who had come up to act as clerk.

"Now, Mr. Gibbs, what is the other name he goes by?" demanded Sir Simon Upplestone, bluntly.

"That I can't exactly say," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"'T is quite sufficient, Sir Simon," said Mr. Middleton. "He may have half a dozen other *aliases*. His going by another name is a proof that he's a swindler. He may call himself colonel this, or lord that, or captain the other, but what is that to us? Now, Mr. Gibbs, I say again, answer truly. Did you ever see this young man in any situation which would induce you to doubt his respectability, or know of his frequenting bad characters, or, — or anything of the kind? Remember, we have good information, Mr. Gibbs."

After some hesitation, Mr. Gibbs replied, "Why, you see, sir, I came down here to sell the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad, which, if you will allow me to say, is one of the most sovereign" —

"Pooh! no more of such nonsense," cried Sir Simon Upplestone. "The question is very plain, Mr. Gibbs. Will you answer it or will you not? There is such a thing as contempt of court, sir, and compounding of felony."

"In one word, Mr. Gibbs," added the other magistrate, "if you do not deal candidly with us, instead of allowing you to be a witness, we may treat you as an accessory."

All Mr. Gibbs's firmness melted away at the threat, and, finding that the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad had failed him, he replied in a humble tone, "Why, gentlemen, I was only going to tell you how all the matter began; when first I came here I was knocked down and robbed, and I am quite sure that I know the man who did it—a fellow well known in these parts, called Jack Williams."

"The greatest rascal and poacher that ever lived," cried Sir Simon.

"Well, gentlemen, I have watched him ever since as close as possible," continued Mr. Gibbs, "and as I heard a great deal of his hanging about Mallington Park, I used to go there of a night to see what he was about. I always took a brace of bosom friends with me, but still I thought it best to keep out of his way, and so I used now and then to get up into a tree. Well, one night, when I was in a beech, with low branches, I saw him meet another man there, and have a long conference with him, though I could not hear what

it was about; but I saw that they often looked towards the place where I was, and I began to be in a leetle bit of a fright. At length they parted, and when Williams took round to the other side of the wood, as if to cut me off that way, the other came straight up towards the tree where I had perched myself. Thinking that I should fare ill between both, I determined to give them leg bail, and, dropping down at once, I took to my heels across the park, only having just time to see that the one who was coming up was Mr. Morton."

"Ho, ho!" cried Sir Simon Upplestone.

"Ah, ha!" cried Mr. Middleton; "and pray what night was that, Mr. Gibbs?"

"Wa'n't that the night that they tried to break into Mallington Hall?" demanded Harry Soames, who had remained in the room.

"Precisely," answered Mr. Gibbs.

"Well, I think, Sir Simon, that we have perfectly enough information, with that which I communicated to you before, to justify us in having this young man apprehended. Fill up a warrant, Mr. Masters," he continued, turning to the clerk; and then, addressing Soames, he proceeded as follows:—"You will get a horse at the Bagpipes, Soames, and ride over immediately to Sturton, where you will endeavour to find out this Mr. Morton, who you think is there. You can make strict inquiries after Jack Williams too."

"I should not wonder if this Morton were to come back here," said the constable.

"We must think of some means of catching him, if he does come," said Mr. Middleton; "but leave that to us, Soames, and be off to Sturton as fast as possible. You, Mr. Gibbs, hold yourself in readiness to attend and give evidence, whenever you may be called upon."

The two magistrates then retired to the drawing-room to converse with the ladies, filled with importance by the transaction in which they had just been engaged.

Mr. Middleton insisted upon Sir Simon's staying to dinner, after which, and a due imbibation of very excellent old port, they parted, Mr. Middleton declaring that he must write a note to Mrs. Charlton, warning her of the character of her late guest, and requiring her to detain him if he should present himself at Mallington House.

To tell the truth, the worthy magistrate was not quite in the proper state by this time to write a letter, either of civility or business, for the lights began to multiply themselves in his eyes, and his tongue was not very glib at its office. Nevertheless, the note was written, and given to a servant, with orders to take it to Mallington House early the next morning. The effect that it produced will be shown hereafter.

CHAPTER XXV.

TOWARDS six o'clock on Sunday morning, a gig, containing two individuals, rolled out of the yard at the Bell Inn, at Sturton, and took the way towards Mallington. It was still dark, for though a light line of grey was to be seen in the sky, the sun had not risen high enough to give much light to the world, and the streets of the town, though it was generally a gay-looking, bustling place, looked dreary and deserted in the misty dawn. The horse which dragged the vehicle, though at so early an hour, looked anything but fresh and ready for his work, and his pace, especially at first, was slow and tiresome. At about a mile, or a mile and a half from the town, however, when he had become warm, he stepped out at a better pace, and went on so rapidly that if all the many persons in carts and cars, who were met by the two contained in the gig, Jack Williams fancied none would recognise him, wrapped up as he was in great coats and handkerchiefs, for he would not be-

lieve that there were any whose memory was sufficiently powerful to recall a face or figure which they had not seen for six or seven years. But men almost always miscalculate in counting upon such things, and worthy Mr. Williams did so in the present instance, for not only was there one, but, on the contrary, several, who not only remembered him instantly, but knew his whole fate and history.

He would rather, certainly, have had the road to himself, and the fact of Mr. Latimer being with him puzzled him a little, so that he more than once asked his companion, as they passed by cart or gig, whether he knew the people in it. Alfred Latimer still answered "No;" but nevertheless, Williams selected the roads which ran nearest to Wenlock Wood, and when he came to a turning leading direct from Sturton to the wild heath at the back of Mallington Park, he drew in the rein, saying, "I think you had better get out here, Mr. Latimer, and while I go on and put up the gig, make the best of your way to the cave. I'll just see how the land lies, and what is going on at Mallington, and then come back and join you there."

"Bring something to eat and drink with you," said Alfred Latimer. "Such work doesn't do for an empty stomach — a bottle of wine would not be amiss."

"A bottle of brandy is better," rejoined Williams; "it goes further, and carries more spirit with it."

“ I sha’n’t need that,” answered Alfred Latimer, nodding his head significantly ; and, well satisfied with the dogged determination that he saw, Williams drove away.

When he was gone the unfortunate young man took his way up the road into the heart of the wood. By this time the day had risen high, the chilly mist of the morning had passed away, the sky was clear and bright above head, and the air fresh and invigorating. At any other time, or with any other thoughts within his bosom, Alfred Latimer might have found the morning wood-walk exhilarating and full of joy. But there is something in the breast of crime discordant with the beauties of nature — it has no part in the harmony of God’s creation ; and perhaps the freshness of the dawn itself, the innocence, it may be called, of infant day is that which jars most harshly with it. Alfred Latimer took no pleasure in the scene. The varying tints afforded by the lesser shrubs by his side, and the older boughs above, had nothing beautiful to his eye. The glimpses of the sky, the occasional catch of the distant landscape, gave him no delight ; the rocky banks with their rugged faces, now imitating the human countenance, now taking some grotesque form of rough-hewn chair or table, or canopy, called up no imagination in his mind. Even the sports and habits of youth were forgotten. A hare started suddenly away from his path, and ran on before till it found its accustomed track into

the wood — a large pheasant flew whirring up through the thin branches of a withered larch, and skimmed over the tops of the trees — a squirrel darted across the road, and, with dropping tail and extended arms, swarmed up the trunk of a tall fir, — but he saw them not, or heeded not if he saw, and with eyes cast down, and arms folded on his chest, he walked on, musing of what was to come.

It was not that he hesitated — it was not that even then he would have gone back if he could — it was not that he gave way to fear or to remorse. The time was not yet come for that; such feelings might have agitated him in the night, and had done so, indeed, as he drove with Williams to Sturton the evening before. But now, in the calm air and the bright light, he walked on, nerv-
ing his heart and preparing himself. He brooded over the meditated crime, and though it cannot be said he longed for the moment of accomplishing it, yet he wished the day were done, for he disliked the tediousness of thoughtful expectation less than the risk and excitement of execution.

At length he came to the spot near which he knew the cave must be, and easily found his way to it. It seemed as if no step had passed its entrance since he was last there. There was the blackened place where the fire had been, the broken bottles, the well-polished bones. Nothing had been touched; and a rabbit running out and making its way to its sandy burrow opposite, at the sound of his

footstep, showed him that, at the present moment, at least, the cave was tenantless.

Sitting down near the entrance, for some time his mind followed the course it had been previously pursuing, but, as if weary of such a subject, it would not rest long upon it. He did not wish it to stray thence, however, and he pictured to himself the inside of Mallington Hall, and laid out the scheme of their night's proceedings. He had often rambled over it in other years, when the old lord was away, and knew every room, and passage, and hall; he could have trod it blindfold; but then his thoughts rested at the vestibule, near the great doors, and he remembered that it was there he had first seen Lucy Edmonds, when she came up one day with some message from her father to the old housekeeper, and how he had walked home with her and talked of a thousand things; and some of the purest feelings he had ever felt—some of the sweetest—revived for an instant. He fancied still, as he had fancied then, that he might have been very happy with Lucy for his wife in some flower-covered cottage, and a middle station. He paused upon the image longer than he wished to do, but there was a fascination in it which he could not resist. Its very contrast with his situation, thoughts, and purposes, at the moment, had something that fixed his spirit upon it.

Then he plunged into a wide abyss of wild and troublous thoughts. We will not attempt to trace them, for it was a labyrinth without a clue, one

branching into another, as if interminably; but their nature, and that to which they tended, may be judged by the words with which they closed, and which he actually uttered in a murmur. "It's no use," he said, "it's no use, I'm too far in now to go back, so why should I think of it?" and once more approaching the mouth of the cave, he looked out and listened.

At length a step sounded upon the path, and he drew back, for he felt sure that it was not that of Williams. It was lighter, quicker, more youthful; but the instant after, as he stood in the shadow, and looked out upon the trees, which concealed the entrance from the neighbouring path, he saw Maltby come round and approach his retreat. Not knowing how far Williams had confided in him, he retired to the back of the hollow; but when the man came near the mouth, it became apparent to Alfred Latimer that the other was seeking him, for Maltby set down a basket with which he was burdened, and looked in, saying "D — n it! he is not here. Williams said he must be here long ago."

"Ah! Maltby, is that you?" said the young man, advancing. "Is Williams coming?"

"Presently," replied Maltby. "He's gone to see Tom Brown; but he sent me up with this basket for you, as he thought you might want your breakfast, having had none when you left Sturton."

"I could have waited," replied Alfred Latimer,

making his way into the basket; "but, I'm devilish hungry, it is true."

"Take care, take care," cried Maltby; "there's a powder flask underneath; for he says that you did not bring any with your pistols."

"They are loaded," answered Alfred Latimer, with a nod of the head; "and I don't think any man who stands two shots from them will ever have to stand another."

"Ay; but it's always as well to be ready and prepared," answered Maltby. "A man's hand shakes sometimes, you know."

"I don't think mine will," answered Alfred Latimer; "but what the mischief is this?"

"Some black crape for your faces, that's all," replied the other.

"Ay, upon my soul! that's well thought of," said the young gentleman. "Under this they won't easily know one. Oh, here's the brandy! Bill, will you take a glass?"

"No, I thank you," answered Maltby. "I'll be off to Mallington again. I've got the horse and gig to see after, and I'm to bring them up to the back of the wood at eleven. Good-day, Mr. Latimer;" and he turned back through the wood, leaving the young gentleman once more alone.

There had been something dry and bitter in his manner, which Alfred Latimer did not altogether like, and vague apprehensions began to take possession of him. "Williams has trusted

him too far," he thought. "I should not wonder if he were to peach, and get us all into a trap. He was always a pitiful scamp, though a devilish good boxer. At all events, I'm sure, if he were hard up he would turn king's evidence, and hang us all."

In these pleasant reveries he passed another hour, till at length Williams himself appeared, and Alfred Latimer at once communicated to him the suspicions which Maltby's manner had inspired. His companion, however, easily quieted him on that score, saying that the youth was a little sulky on account of the quarrel they had had some days before; but that he would not peach for his own sake, as then he would lose all the money he was to have; and as to his turning king's evidence, he might do what he liked, for they would be out of the country before that could do them any harm.

These assurances satisfied Alfred Latimer; but, nevertheless, the passing of that day was long and tedious. They sometimes talked, but more frequently remained plunged in deep fits of silence, meditating the coming hour; but Williams was well pleased to see that, though his young companion had become unnaturally grave and stern, there was no sign of wavering, no apparent hesitation, not even a thought of shrinking from the enterprise before them.

Thus they saw noon and evening pass, and gradually the sun went down, leaving the sky

all red and glowing for full half an hour after he had sunk. All then became darkness; the stars, indeed, appearing first faint and then brighter, but the air below in the valley by the river becoming somewhat dull and misty as the sun disappeared.

"Tom Brown can't be long now," said Williams at length. "I'll go out and see if he be coming," and accordingly he walked away into the wood, while Latimer remained with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes half closed. It would have been a sad dark spectacle, if one could have looked into his bosom at that moment. Suddenly he rose, went up to the basket, and drawing forth the bottle of brandy, set it to his lips. He took a long draught, and had scarcely done when Williams and the ruffian from the common came into the cave.

"We must wait an hour or two yet," said the former. "Tom here tells me, sir, that there are a number of the good folks about, and that Edmonds is out with his men, scouring all the place round; so we must be still. When does the moon rise, Tom?"

"She's up now, only you can't see her for the hill," replied the ruffian.

"Ay! but at what hour does she come up?" asked Williams. "I see she has risen plain enough, by the light, but I want to know what o'clock it is?"

"Oh! about ten," answered Alfred Latimer;

“but if you wait a little you’ll hear Mallington clock strike.”

A few minutes after the clock was heard to strike ten, and it was then agreed to wait another hour, in order that all might be still, and the sober folks of the neighbourhood retired to rest.

Eleven struck, and then, taking some keys, the powder-flask, and an iron bar out of the basket, with hardly a word spoken, they issued out into the wood, threaded the narrow paths, approached the scene of their destined crime from the side of Wenlock-common, and paused for an instant close to the Park. A few words of final arrangement then passed, one by one they leaped the wall, and Alfred Latimer stood within Mallington Park.

END OF VOL II.





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